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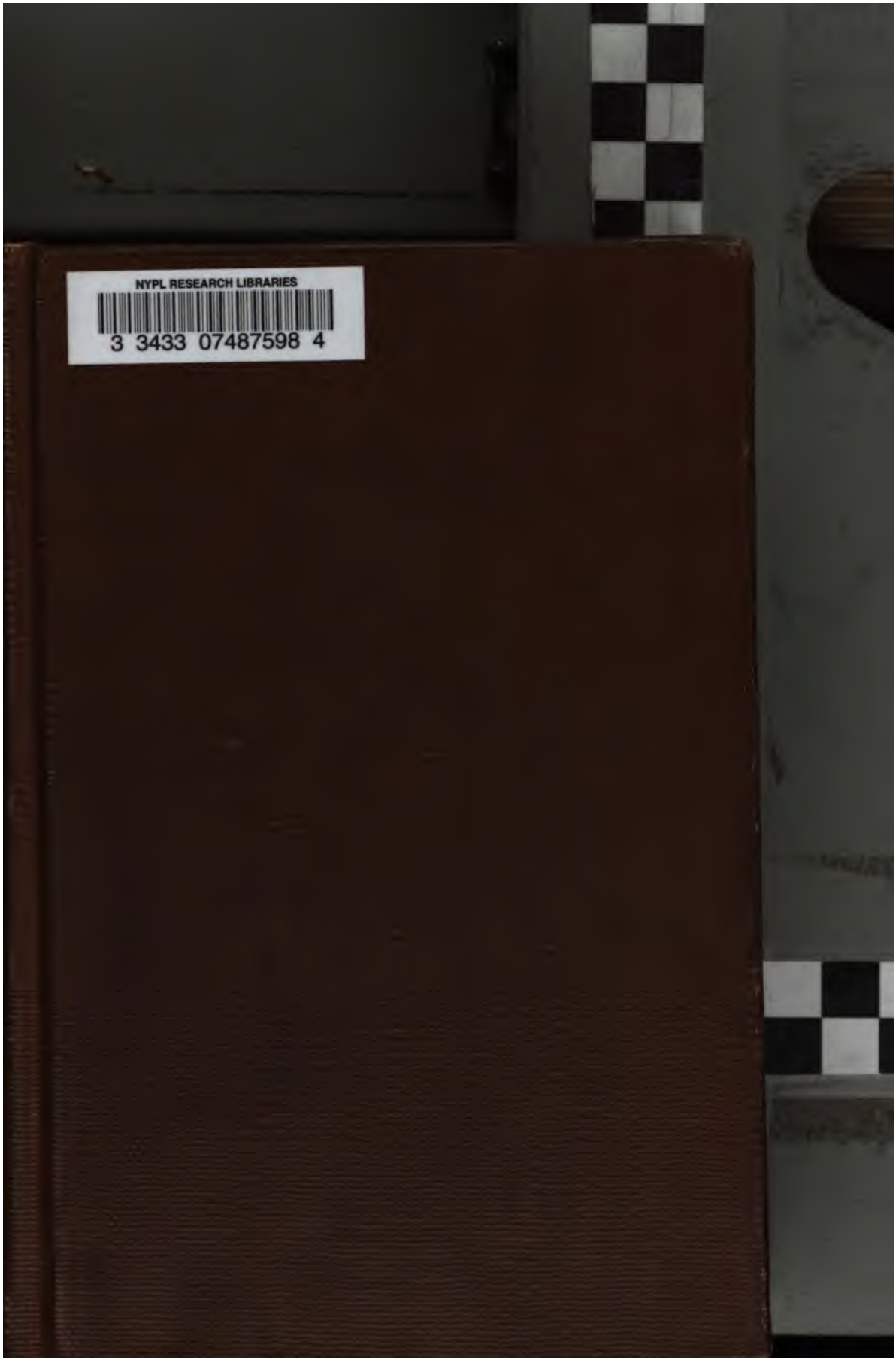
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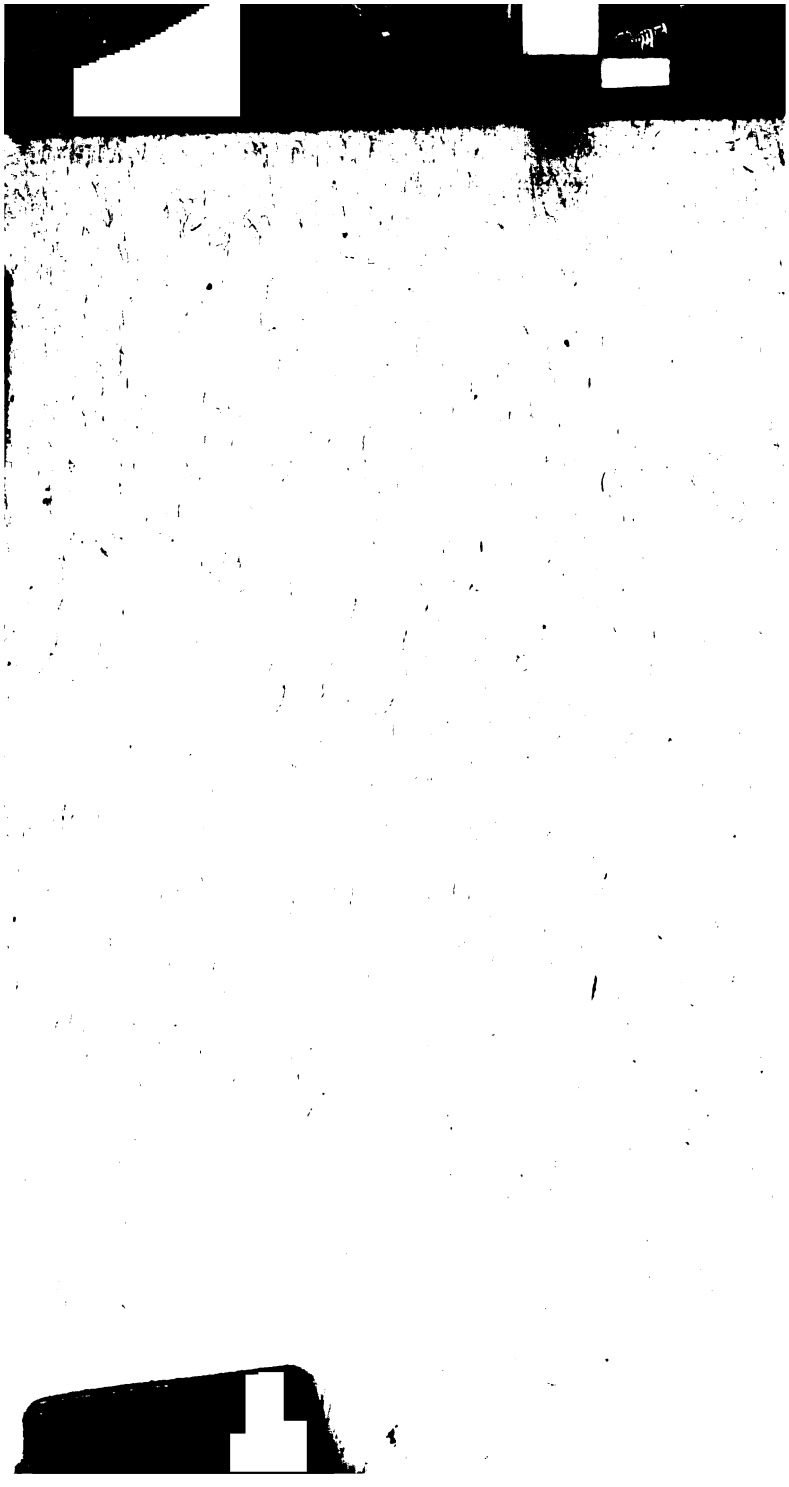

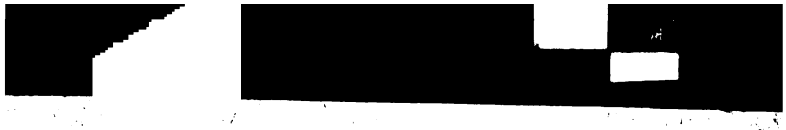

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The White Trail

THE DOG BRINGS ARCHIE TO THE AID OF THE DISABLED INDIAN

The White Trail

A Story of the Early Days of Klondike

By
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Preface

The White Trail is a story from life, and not a single character mentioned therein has been created to fulfil the purpose of the storyteller's art. From a traveller this may be taken either as an apology for his own demerits of diction, or as an incentive to the reader to accept much of his statements in their truer light of realism. May I venture to put forth both pleas?

The early days of Klondike are yet of comparatively recent period, and round them clings the glamor of modern romance — most rare attraction in these days when we are over apt to assume that all stirring episodes must of necessity belong to a bygone age. It is generally admitted that the great rush to the sub-Arctic El Dorado remains unparalleled in goldfields' history. The difficulties which the striving pioneers had to face were even more deadly than can be truly described, and in this narrative the dangers of the trail have rather been minimized than exaggerated.

It is no wish of mine to glorify the search for gold, though, if it must be obtained, surely the crust of the earth yields up its store without contaminating the seeker. Archibald Ralston did not desire riches for the mere sake of riches; he sought only the means whereby a noble end might be achieved. Gold he

found truly, in the Indian creek of Too-much-gold, but it was gold of another kind, a non-material kind, that made him rich indeed; for the gold of human nature, of faithful comradeship, is surely beyond all price.

The story deals with an actual journey, and with an actual people. The main incidents throughout may be accepted as having actually occurred, though in a few cases they are somewhat modified, and the descriptions of the country are as nearly as possible geographically and geologically correct, viewed back over a lapse of eleven years. Incidentally I may say that the dog Dave was my own dog.

If *The White Trail* may serve in any way to encourage energy and initiative, and a broader sympathy for human kind, in the youth of our land, then its mission will be fully accomplished, and its author more than gratified.

ALEXANDER MACDONALD.

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The White Trail

CHAPTER I

RALSTON BROTHERS

THE firm of Ralston Brothers was not a large one. Their office occupied one dingy room on the second floor of a commercial tenement in Wellington Street, Glasgow, while their factory, so-called, was merely an adjacent room in which two, and sometimes four, skilled workmen labored in the production of certain delicate forms of mechanism which afterwards, as the fates decreed, might or might not be recognized by the engineering world as useful, and perhaps even remarkable, inventions. The inscription on the smoked-glass doorway of the office, through which one had to pass in order to reach the inner workroom or laboratory, gave some indefinite clue to the business carried on within; it read: "Ralston Brothers, Engineers and Inventors."

The history of the firm was a somewhat strange one. At the very beginning of its career the scientific world was profoundly interested in a new theory in dynamics which emanated from the brain of Ralph Ralston, the elder of the two brothers. The

theory, indeed, was borne out by a working demonstration of its practical utility in the shape of a small model, which did all that, according to preconceived laws, it had no right to do. Still, the graybeards, whose dictum is always more or less final in the initial stage of all things new, reserved their condemnatory criticism for quite a considerable time. The model was all right, and did everything claimed for it, but the theory — ah, there was the trouble! the theory simply set at naught many time-honored textbook laws, and surely it could not possibly be correct. While these learned men were cogitating deeply over the subject, and even making guarded statements to the technical press on the matter, it occurred to an enterprising editor of a scientific journal to ask: " Who is this Ralston, and what is the firm Ralston Brothers? " His interview promptly obtained for him the desired information, and then the astounding discovery was given to the world that Ralph Ralston was but a young man, only twenty-three in fact, while his brother, Archie, was barely eighteen. The interviewer, with the kindliest intentions in the world, had thought fit to dilate on the youthfulness of the young inventors. Then were the vials of wrath unloosed on the young engineers' heads; the graybeards aforementioned suddenly came to the definite conclusion that Ralston's theory was all wrong. And what right had mere boys to intrude their views in the domain of the learned and the wise? Their presumption was to be severely condemned. So it happened that from that time to the period at which this story opens, just one year, the model had continued working in a corner of the

laboratory where it was built, but the theory of its evolution was forgotten by the outside world — until it should be rediscovered in the years to come.

Meanwhile the inventive brain of the elder Ralston had not been inactive, and numerous useful contrivances continued to be built under his tireless supervision. Some of these found purchasers at moderate figures, others did not, and the profits of the successful went largely towards the expenses of the unsuccessful, leaving but a small reward at the year's end for the upkeep of a home.

Those who knew the two Ralstons intimately — and they were few — understood and appreciated the end for which the young lads strove. When Richard Ralston, the father, died, leaving as hostages to fortune a widow, two sons, and a daughter, people said it was just what might have been expected of him, reasoning on the well-worn assumption that a rolling stone gathers no moss; and Dick Ralston had certainly earned a reputation as a wanderer before settling down in Glasgow as a consulting engineer. He could speak most entertainingly of the work he had accomplished in distant lands, of bridge building in South America, railway construction in Australia, and sundry similar works carried on in remote corners of the earth; but somehow the people he met in his more conventional capacity in the great engineering city did not seem to want any railways laid or bridges built, for Richard Ralston, C. E., though famous abroad, was in the land of his boyhood like the prophet of old. What people did not know was that he had returned to the scene of his own early experience with the one

idea of having his children educated in a city famous for the erudition of its professors and masters; and latterly it seemed that his entire interest in life was centred in their progress; and they certainly did not disappoint the broken man. The boys' special training had been in the sciences; their desire for knowledge in this direction seemed insatiable. Ralph, the confidant of his father, appeared to realize, even in these early years, the gravity of his position as a student; for him the lighter side of things had little attraction, and consequently the lines of care and thought obtained a far too prominent place on his youthful brow.

As for Archie, the younger, he was called from his studies before they were nearly completed to his satisfaction, for Dick Ralston, having seen his eldest son reach man's estate, laid himself down and died, died of a malignant fever contracted in the Tropics, which only the Tropics could cure. Just before the end he had called the brothers to his bedside.

"My lads," he said slowly and quietly, "I am going. I know the old symptoms, and I am a bit too weak to fight against my enemy now. My temperature will keep rising until poor old Dick Ralston's driving engine will be unable to keep the pumps going against the extra pressure. I leave you but the broken threads of a paltry business, but I would advise you to strike out on a new line for yourselves. Your education is all I have been able to give you; make the most of it, my lads." His voice failed him for the moment, then with an effort he continued, almost in a whisper: "Look after the mater and Queenie, Ralph, and you, Archie, help

your brother to keep the old flag flying. Let your pride rise superior to poverty. Goodbye!" He reached out a wan, white hand, which the youths, with bursting hearts, clasped in silence. Then all was still, save for the subdued weeping of the widow, and the sobbing of the fatherless daughter.

Thus it happened that a dire responsibility was thrust upon the all too immature shoulders of the youthful Ralstons; yet never for an instant did they flinch under the burden. The small office and laboratory in Wellington Street were opened within a fortnight after their father's death, and almost immediately thereafter Ralston's new theory was given to the world, with the result already stated.

A year had passed, a year for the young firm of indomitable striving, a little occasional success, and much disappointment, and already the inevitable crisis in its career had to be faced.

It was a fine autumn morning in the year 1897 when Archie Ralston bounded up the stairs leading to the little office. He was a medium-sized youth of wiry rather than strong build; this much could be noted as he hastened on his way, negotiating two steps at a time, as if some urgent need for hurry controlled his actions. He strode along the passageway of the second floor, feeling in his pocket the while for the office key. Then, having found it, he was preparing to insert it in the lock of the door bearing the brave inscription: "Ralston Brothers," when a sudden thought seemed to seize him, and he turned the door handle without first using the key. Apparently the door had not been locked, for it swung open at once. With a startled ejacu-

lation the youth burst into the room and looked around him wonderingly; the papers on the desk had to all appearance not been touched. Quickly the young man threw up the lid — which also gave way without the aid of a key — and peered inside. Then he let it fall with a crash. "Gone!" he muttered; "the plan is gone. I wonder what the thieves have done with Ralph." He stood for a moment perplexed, then sniffed the air enquiringly. A faint but subtle odor filled the room. "Why, dear me," he said in surprise, "the vat must have been left in circuit all night; the scent will be pretty powerful in the laboratory if all the windows are closed."

He opened the door leading into the adjacent room, and at once dense yellow fumes enveloped him; but he heeded them not. Through the murky atmosphere his eyes sought out a peculiarly shaped contrivance mounted on rough supports near the window, from which a gentle bubbling sound seemed to emanate. Several mysterious-looking wires led from it to an electric generator near at hand. Archie stepped forward and gingerly disconnected one of the rubber-covered spirals; then he gazed around and uttered a cry of amazement, for seated on a chair opposite the fireplace — the fire had long since gone out — was his brother Ralph, with his head inclined forward on his breast, fast asleep, while in one hand, grasped tightly, was the missing plan, with many new notes and sundry strange hieroglyphics marked freshly upon it. Archie gazed at the sleeper for a moment, his face showing the conflicting emotions of joy and sadness, then he noiselessly

opened the window and went over to his brother's side. " Ralph," he said, shaking the sleeper's arm, " Ralph! Wake up! "

The senior partner awoke with a start, and surveyed his brother blankly. " What's the trouble, Archie? " he asked quickly. A breath of the tainted atmosphere entered his throat as he spoke, and he coughed violently. " I must have dropped off to sleep and left the concern working," he added, when he had recovered himself.

" You're half-asleep yet," cried Archie in vexation. " You don't seem to realize that you didn't come home at all last night."

Ralph sighed wearily and rubbed his hand across his eyes. " I wanted to work out the final experiment after the men had gone last night," he said. " There was a good deal to bother about, and I found one or two flaws in the theory which took me some time to get over. I must have fallen asleep while making my alterations in the plan. I am very sorry, Archie; I hope the mater didn't think anything had happened."

" Why didn't you tell me you meant to do some special work last night? " demanded Archie half-indignantly. " Wasn't I with you at the beginning, and didn't I work out the main experiments with you? Surely," he broke out passionately, " I can be of some use! "

" I didn't want you to be present, Archie," answered the elder brother quietly. " I was afraid of disappointment, and as you had to attend your classes in the evening I thought it was a fair thing to let you have one night's peace."

He stood up and commenced to walk backwards and forwards across the room with quick, nervous strides. Ralph Ralston was slightly taller than his brother, but apart from that difference, and the more aged expression on his face, there was a wonderful similarity in the features of the two. The clean-cut profile of the one was reproduced in the other. The same deep-set gray eyes were the characteristic of both.

" It's all right, old man," said Archie with forced cheerfulness, " but," and he grasped his brother affectionately by the arm as he came near, " you are always trying to save me, and if I am not old enough to keep my end up now, what good am I to the firm? I told the mater yesterday evening that you would be late, but I did not dream of your staying up all night in the laboratory. Honestly I thought something had happened to you when you didn't turn up, so I cleared out early this morning to investigate. When I came into the office I even thought someone had attacked you and stolen the plan. But come, let us go home and have breakfast before Mother and Queenie miss us."

" You're right, Archie," said Ralph, " the worries of the office must stay in the office, and please goodness we'll keep the home intact in spite of all, though things do look gloomy enough in the meantime." They went out into the passage, and were halfway downstairs, when Ralph stopped suddenly.

" I believe I had better go back and put that smelliferous machine of ours somewhere out of the way before the engineers arrive," said he; " I don't want people to investigate it too closely."

"Why bother about it?" exclaimed Archie. "Surely our failure will not affect others ——"

"Failure?" interrupted Ralph. "The process is no failure, boy ——"

"I thought you said —" Archie began excitedly, but words failed him, and he made a wild burst back to the laboratory.

"It is no failure," reiterated Ralph, as he too reached the laboratory to find Archie on his knees beside the strange gas-evolving receptacle. "The gold is thrown down free from impurity, the refractory ore with Ralstons' process is refractory no longer. Take out the gravitation chamber, Archie; what do you see there?"

"Gold!" exclaimed Archie, emptying a strain of what looked like fine yellow sand into his hand from the inverted vessel.

"Just so," agreed his brother without enthusiasm; "but Archie, did you ever think of what we should require to have before we could benefit by our discovery?"

"I didn't," came the slow response, "but now I understand. We need a gold mine to produce the ore."

"Yes, that is so, Archie. Or we could arrange to treat the useless ore at some of the big mines at a certain price per ton; only, you see, the discovery would be ours just as long as the secret remained unknown, for of course we cannot patent a discovery, and any analytical engineer could soon solve the problems we have worked out if he were allowed to examine the apparatus when working. I foresaw our main difficulty at the start, and I wrote

to some of the biggest Western American companies about a month ago asking if they would be willing to give us a chance if we were successful, but no reply has come along, so I suppose we can call our metallurgical process a scientific success but a financial failure."

Archie took up the model in his arms and silently carried it through to the office. " No one will bother examining it here," he said, placing the vat on the floor. " Now let us go and have breakfast, Ralph, and," he added bitterly, " after that we'll see if we can't devise a new form of hairpin or something about equally important. It's about time we left off groping in the dark corridors of science and applied our energies to something really useful."

They closed their office door once more, and, arm in arm, set forth for their home in the western suburbs. It was then but seven o'clock in the morning.

At this time the firm of Ralston Brothers was undoubtedly in a bad way. Its income was erratic and uncertain, and the chief fear of the senior partner was that the lean months of the immediate past would be continued into the future. The profession of inventor is at best but a haphazard one, and success largely depends upon the commercial ability of the inventor when it comes to a case of selling the fruits of his genius. In this direction the Ralstons admittedly did not shine; they had not the gift of self advertisement, they could not laud their own achievements, and consequently, being unfitted by nature to wage war in the commercial lists of the great city, they, after their first spasmodic success or two, were gradually but surely being driven to the wall.

Curiously enough it did not occur to them to value their ideas high enough, otherwise, in one or more instances, they might have reaped quite a rich reward instead of the trivial sum received. They were both too young and too unsophisticated to achieve success without the kindly helping hand of someone who knew the world and its ways better than they did; and this fact they were only beginning to realize. They reached their home after about twenty minutes' sharp walking, but — alas for their plans of secrecy concerning the all-night vigil in the laboratory! — the gentle-faced mother met them at the doorway, her eyes expressing the anxious thoughts that trembled on her lips. "This is too much, Ralph," she said reproachfully. "You have been late at the laboratory many times, but for your health's sake I must ask you to try and have no more all-night sittings. You see I know all about it," she explained with a smile, turning to Archie, who indeed looked somewhat nonplussed. "You can't hide these things from me, boys —— "

"It's all right, little mother," hastily interposed Ralph. "The fact is, I went to sleep last night while watching a rather lengthy experiment."

Mrs. Ralston said no more, but gazed after the youthful breadwinners somewhat wistfully as they marched off to their room to make themselves presentable before having breakfast. It was odd, too, how they managed to recollect some wonderful subjects for impromptu jokes as they busied themselves at their toilet. No one who heard their merry laughter would have dreamt that in the hearts of these same two humorists there dwelt a feeling akin to

despair. Oh, brave spirits that can ever keep a smile for the home, however depressed, and by their sunny influence gild the lining of the gloomiest clouds! So well did they dissemble their feelings that even the fond mother was deceived at the breakfast table, and ventured to ask mildly if a new success had been achieved by the firm.

"Of course I know what it is," cried Queenie, aged fifteen, the blooming young sister of the inventors, who had been deftly coaxing her brothers to eat by insinuating fresh pieces of toast into their plates at short intervals, which they obediently and absent-mindedly consumed. "I know; the electro-chemical hydro-carbonaceous metallurgical process has worked all right. Bother these big names! If they had been simple I'm sure you wouldn't have had half the trouble with the business. Isn't that right, Archie?"

"Oh, you've got the names near enough!" admitted her brother, with evasive gravity, and before the subject could be pursued further the postman's imperative knock was heard, which sent Queenie flying in anticipatory delight to answer the summons. She returned, looking rather disappointed, carrying a blue oblong envelope in her hand. "It's only for Ralston Brothers," she said. "I suppose it is an advertisement about how to grow rich by becoming an engineer, or something of that sort."

"Probably!" agreed Ralph grimly, making no effort to receive the fancied ironical epistle.

"I'll save the stamps anyhow," said Queenie. "It's American ——"

"What?" shouted Ralph and Archie in one

breath. In a surprisingly short space of time the despised letter was in the senior partner's hands. "I quite forgot that I wrote my letter from the home address," he whispered hurriedly across the table to his brother. Archie nodded and his face flushed eagerly as he waited for the letter to be opened.

It was now impossible to hide the fact that the missive was supposed to be of some considerable importance. Mrs. Ralston looked at her elder son anxiously, and Queenie's eyes waited expectantly the opening of the envelope.

Ralph hesitated for a second or two, then nonchalantly tossed the sealed packet across the table. "You read it, Archie," he said. "The sensation will be like watching the result of a doubtful experiment, and you may as well have your share of the thrills."

In a moment the seal was broken and a thin typewritten sheet fluttered on to the table. Archie seized the flimsy note and scrutinized the writing carefully, his face brightening perceptibly the while. "It's from the Union Gold Mining Company of Washington, Ralph," he said, striving to keep his voice level.

"Read it out," returned Ralph laconically, and the youth forthwith proceeded:

"DEAR SIR: — We have received your communication *re* the treatment of refractory ores by Ralston's Process, and have gone carefully into the matter. As you are probably aware, numerous attempts have been made by various metallurgical chemists

to get a satisfactory return from the so-called telluride ores which form a large portion of the lode in our mines, but in no instance have the results been even moderately successful. You will pardon us, therefore, if we do not feel over sanguine concerning the practical working of your scheme. However, we are perfectly open to be convinced, and if you care to erect a small plant here, we shall lend you every assistance possible, and pay you royalty of say 15 per cent. on the gross realizable value of every ton of ore treated.

"We need scarcely say that we shall make no attempt to discover the secret of your process. Nevertheless we cannot hold ourselves responsible for its safety, and we would therefore ask you, should you decide on sending a small plant here, to send the same out in the charge of your most trustworthy man, unless it might be your intention to accompany the outfit yourselves, which would be the better plan if you can spare the time.

"We are, yours faithfully,
"Union Gold Mining Company,
"per H. PEARSON, Managing Director."

"H—m! Non-committal, if apparently honest enough," commented Ralph. "But of course we couldn't have expected anything more."

"Is the process really a success, Ralph?" ventured Mrs. Ralston timidly, but with shining eyes.

"Completed it last night, Mother, and tried it on some specimens I got from the Secretary of the Mammoth Gold Mining Company, As it stands now I think the thing is without a flaw."

"Oh!" interjected Queenie, unable longer to restrain herself; "now we'll be rich!"

"Not so fast, Queen of Sheba," reproved Archie, taking the cue from his brother. "A lot has to be done before we benefit much."

"Ay, a lot has to be done," repeated Ralph wearily. "The plant itself on a small scale could be made in a few days; but I dare not risk going out to the West even on such a promising errand. If by any chance the secret were discovered there would be no reward, and there are many things which make the journey but a speculative venture."

"Couldn't you send another man, dear?" asked Mrs. Ralston quietly.

"No, Mother, for in the first place he would want a fee that we couldn't afford to pay, and in the second place no man knows anything about the construction of the affair."

"And that's just where the junior partner gets a chance of showing what he is made of," cried Archie, rising to his feet and gazing at his brother with calm earnestness. "It is no use trying to keep it quiet longer, Mother," he explained, noting her wondering look. "Something has to be done, or Ralston Brothers will go under. Ralph, you have done pretty well all the work so far. Let me do something now. It won't cost much: only the price of my ticket to the West. I won't take a return. It's a chance for the firm and for the home, Ralph; let me take it."

"As you will, Archie," came the answer gravely.

CHAPTER II

A YOUTHFUL AMBASSADOR

IT was a cold and disagreeable morning when Archie arrived at Lime Street Station, Liverpool, *en route* for the West. Little more than a week had passed since it was decided that he should set forth on his fateful mission, and now he had reached the great English seaport from which so many dauntless Britons had sailed away to seek in new lands the wider scope for their ambitions which the country of their birth could not afford.

He surveyed the deserted platform somewhat ruefully for a moment. The hour was early and only the porters whose duty it was to meet the train were in evidence. " I wish I had let Ralph come down with me after all," he muttered, a feeling of desolation entering his heart; but he checked the weakening impulse immediately. " It is better as it is," he decided half-aloud. " It would only make it worse for me to say goodbye again." With this philosophical reasoning he buttoned his overcoat tightly around him and walked off to superintend the unloading of his luggage from the van; already his few fellow passengers had disappeared in the mists beyond the station portals.

Archie's personal effects were apparently not a

cumbersome commodity. A fair-sized portmanteau and a small handbag, bearing his name, and addressed: "*S. S. Campania*, Passenger," had already been given in charge of a porter, who now waited to receive from the van the bulkier packages similarly addressed. But clearly the strange oblong and iron-ribbed case that was hauled forth contained something other than mere clothing. The weary railway servant gazed somewhat askance at his prospective burden, until he suddenly discovered that it required no Samsonian effort to move it.

"There's a good deal of waste space in this here concern, sir," he commented, lifting, with scarcely an effort, the box containing the wonderful mechanism of Ralston's Process.

"No, I think not, porter," replied the youth, smiling; "it's all pretty useful. But you see it's not charged just now — no! no! there's nothing dangerous in it — " as the official drew back in alarm. "Take it to the left-luggage office, and don't smash it about any more than you can help. I'll call after breakfast and take it down to the ship."

"Are you travelling by the *Campania*, sir? " came a voice at his elbow, and a man wearing a uniform cap stepped forward. "Hi there, porter," he called out, as that individual was wheeling his load away, "I'll take charge of that luggage."

"Oh, you will, will you? " cried Archie in some annoyance, "I rather think you won't."

"I am the Cunard agent, sir, and it is my duty to attend to the shipment of passengers' baggage."

"Well, you won't attend to mine," declared Archie

decisively. "I — " But the agent had turned on his heel and walked away.

"There, I have gone and made a bloomer first shot," communed the boy with himself. "I suppose he really was what he said, but how the dickens was I to know that he was genuine. Hang it all! It must be that the custody of the Process is breaking up my nerves, when I can actually be uncivil to a man. Ah well, my troubles are only beginning! A minor difficulty, I suppose, will be to find some place open at this hour where I can have breakfast, or at least a cup of tea."

He walked away from the empty platform, and turned out into the street. It was raining, and the guttering street lamps blinked mistily through the gloom. Everything seemed wet and dismal, and inexpressibly dreary. The boy shuddered at the uninviting prospect, then, bowing his head to the storm, he started to run, colliding almost immediately with a burly figure in a glistening waterproof that was hurrying in the opposite direction. The force of concussion was so severe that Archie staggered and would have fallen, had not the powerful grip of the other held him up, while a gruff yet kindly voice addressed him.

"You young battering ram, can you not steer a better course than that? You had room enough to pass without trying to knock the wind out o' me."

"I am very sorry," began Archie breathlessly; but the big man intervened at once.

"When you say that, my laddie, I feel moved by a magnanimous impulse to take the blame myself,

for I'll not deny that I might have given you a wider berth than I did, an'——"

"If you'll excuse me," said Archie in his politest manner, "I'm getting very wet —— "

"An' you can stand getting a wee bit wetter, my man," came the stern rebuke, and a great paw was laid restrainingly on his shoulder. "You've actually spoiled one o' the most eloquent apologetic speeches in my repertory, an' wounded my feelin's vera injudiciously." He interrupted himself with a jerk. "By the Great Southern Cross," he ejaculated, "I had forgotten all about meeting that train from the North! Goodbye!" He strode off at once. Then it was Archie who prolonged the conversation. He did so somewhat unwillingly, it is true, but he felt impelled to give the information.

"The Northern train came in about ten minutes ago," he cried after the disappearing Scot; "there is no one at the station now."

Something remarkably like a forcible expression exploded from the man's lips. "Is it possible? he apostrophized, turning back. "Is it actually a fact that I have missed meeting that Pharisee after all my hurry?"

By this time Archie had decided to go back to the waiting-room at the station rather than risk a further wetting in his quest for an early restaurant. His chance acquaintance of the morning seemed now plunged in deepest dejection. He walked slowly after the boy, and took up a solitary position on the empty platform, whence he gazed eagerly around as if expecting to see someone secreted in the vicinity. The glare from an overhead arc lamp illuminated

his features, and Archie, who had turned round half-unconsciously, saw the face of the man with whom he had been holding converse. And it was no ordinary face he saw. Rugged and even grim were the outlines of it, yet in spite of this there was a lurking air of humor about the mouth which even the heavy bronze mustache could not hide. He was a man apparently of about thirty-five years of age, but belonged to no type that Archie in his inexperience could recognize. Yet of one thing he was satisfied; he felt sure that his disappointed acquaintance was no confidence man, such as he had been warned against. He had just come to this conclusion when he was again addressed by the Scot, who had evidently been conscious of the boy's scrutiny.

" I say, my lad, would it be an impertinent question to ask if you travelled by that extra-ordinarily punctual train which I have missed, owing to my misguided belief in the procrastinating nature o' railway engines in general? "

" I came from Glasgow with it, sir," responded Archie.

" An' did you by any chance happen to observe a long, lanky son of a gun get aboard at the same place? " persisted the questioner with much interest.

" What sort of man was he? " asked the youth, not much enlightened.

" I'll make mysef plainer; did you notice a tall and elegant sort o' man, with flame-coloured hair, a similarly tinted mustache that would have suited a walrus, a parboiled complexion, an' a nose in harmony wi' his other personal attractions? "

Archie laughed outright. " Why, I am sure I did

see such a man," he said; " in fact I was getting into the same carriage with him, but he looked at me so savagely that I changed my mind and got a seat somewhere else."

" That would be him right enough, that was bound to be Stewart; his extreme sociable qualities were aye a noted feature in his deportment. Where did he go, my lad? Did he trek right away, or did you hear him murmuring gently to himself as he stood an' looked around the spacious arena? "

" I did not take any notice, sir; you see, I am going out by the *Campania* to-day, and I was worrying about my luggage too much to observe where anyone went."

" You're going with the *Campania?* So am I, laddie, and so is that wandering baboon I am looking for. Ah well, I suppose a merciful Providence will see that he doesn't come to harm, and he'll most likely turn up smiling like a fairy before the boat sails. However,"— here he stamped sturdily upon the flagged floorway, as if he found it necessary to dispel by energetic action his dire misgivings for the lost one, — " I am considerably obliged to you, young man, and as we are to be shipmates for a week I may introduce myself now."

At this stage he drew himself up stiffly, and with stern expression began: " My name is Mac — an' on the Grampian Hills my father —— "

" You mean Norval," corrected Archie mischievously.

' No, sir, I said Mac, an' Mac it is; do you think the Grampians is a figure o' speech, or the special preserve o' a man that lived ten thousand years ago? "

"But Mac what?" urged Archie, much amused.

"To my friends I am just Mac, my lad; to others I acknowledge the imposing title of James Mackay — Esquire — An' what may your name be?"

"I have not the honor of prefixing my name with a 'Mac,'" replied Archie with due humility. "I am only an Englishman, born abroad, and educated in Glasgow. I am called Archibald Ralston."

'And a good name too," agreed Mac with sudden soberness of demeanor. "I once knew a man of that name." He paused a moment, and seemed lost in thought. "An' what were you hurrying about when you bumped into me?" he demanded unceremoniously.

The boy's reply that he had been in quest of his breakfast appeared to awake in his companion a new excitement. "That's exactly where Stewart has gone," he cried with much satisfaction. "Stewart never could neglect an opportunity for being good to himself. Ten to one we'll find the white-eyed kaffir gorging his inner man in the hotel here. Come wi' me, Archie Ralston, Esquire; you'll find no shops open at this hour in the morning, but I'll guarantee we can get a' we want in the hotel."

Archie's face flushed. "But the expense —" he was beginning.

The big man linked his arm in that of his companion, and drew him unceremoniously along with him. "When Mac asks a man's company, he is always willing to foot the bill," he grunted, as they entered the doorway.

It would only be strictly in accordance with facts to state that Archie did not much favor the prospect

of meeting the individual designated as Stewart; his slight recollection of the man brought back to him a picture of an uncouth desperado, and as youth is apt to assume a good deal on first impressions, the prevailing hope in the young traveller's heart at that moment was that friend Mac's deduction as to his probable presence within the hotel would prove to be in error. But his desire in this direction was not to be gratified. A waiting attendant led them to a small coffee-room kept specially for early visitors, and ushered them in without ceremony. Only one man was there before them, and he was seated at a table near the fire, gazing abstractedly at an empty plate in front of him. Archie had no difficulty in recognizing him, even from the grandiloquent description he had been given of the strayed one some minutes earlier. But to all appearance Stewart at this time seemed in no way concerned over his friend's failure to meet him at the station; he did not even look up when the newcomers entered, but he was startled to his feet quick enough when a voice hailed him thus:

"Stewart, you backsliding Eskimo!——"

"Mac, you case-hardened kangaroo!" he roared boisterously in reply, leaping forward.

Both epithets seemed to find much favor, and the two men clasped hands in a way that spoke of long absence from each other. They continued to unload themselves of many similarly veiled compliments, and Archie, feeling himself somewhat in the light of an intruder, walked a little way apart and watched the pair with ever-increasing interest. Stewart, he noted, was comparatively a young man, and his

gaunt frame and ruddy-hued face contrasted oddly with the more ponderous build of his companion, whose features, too, were deeply bronzed as if by much exposure to a tropical sun.

"An' how could you," Mac began feelingly — "how could you come in here, you grinning gorilla, an' banquet yoursel' when you knew I had been waiting for you a' night in the cauld, damp, an' lonesome street."

"I didna think you meant to meet me," pleaded Stewart, much moved, "an' I never thought o' lookin' to see wha was on the platform."

"Not another word! I forgive you!" quoth Mac, adroitly interposing; and Archie, catching his glance at that moment, thought he saw a temporary total eclipse of one of his optics; but perhaps he was mistaken.

It was somewhere about this stage that Stewart seemed to become aware of the youth's presence, and an unlovely expression mantled up in his features. He raised two great knuckled hands to his weather eye, — the neighboring orb he closed so tightly as to contract wholly the corresponding side of his physiognomy, — and, forming a rude telescope therewith, glared at the supposed intruder with cyclopean malevolence. "Ship ahoy!" he hailed in a weird sing-song whisper. Then deftly sliding his improvised spy-glass arrangement across to the convulsed side of his features, the while he diverted his concentrated glare into the corresponding optic with seeming automatic adjustment of his tense grimace, he hailed again, in a voice audible and grim: "Whatna strange craft is that?"

Archie, somewhat alarmed, started to make a bee line for the door. Then Mac's voice arose admonishingly. "Ca' canny, Stewart, my man, don't frighten the lad; it's no fair o' you —" He ceased in order to stay Archie's exit, then continued with mild reproof: "Forbye, he's my protégé."

But Stewart had subsided in the nearest chair, and was feebly murmuring to himself: "Frighten the lad! Me frighten the lad! An' everybody kens I'm so soft-hearted I couldna even startle a bird off a blackberry bush!"

He appeared so completely overcome at the ungenerous accusation that Archie was moved with compassion for him, and even contemplated throwing oil on the troubled waters; but Mac's formal introduction, being let loose at that moment, checked for the time his good-natured impulse. "Stewart, you uncivilized backslider," began the burly one in winning tones, "let me introduce to your vera favorable notice a young lad o' vera promising parts, who has rendered me most valuable services. His name is Archie Ralston." Here Stewart arose from his seat, and bowed most profoundly. "As I was about to remark," continued the speaker with growing eloquence, "this young lad is setting out on a lang journey — nearly half as far as we are goin'— an' we must make it our duty to give him the benefit of our experienced counsel at a' times, an'— an'—" At this stage he floundered somewhat, but quickly recovering the thread of his discourse he proceeded bravely. "An' should any Philistine or Philistines attempt to molest him, it will be our pleasure, Stewart, my man, to arise in our wrath and, for the sake of

auld Scotland, which we so seldom see, smite the hyenas wi' right goodwill."

He stopped from sheer lack of breath, and Stewart, deeply affected, made feeling answer: "Ay, Mac, even as you say. We will smite them wi' a fearfu' smicht." He reached out a powerful hand in token of goodwill, and Archie returned his grip heartily. "I am indeed glad to know you, sir," he said, "and I am sorry I did not travel from Glasgow in the same carriage. I — I thought you were angry with me."

"Shivering icebergs! So you are the young lad wha came into my boudoir, an' then went oot again hastily in spite o' a' my endeavors to be freendly. I even smiled at you maist rapturously ——"

"That's enough," interrupted Mac grimly. "No wonder the lad was frightened." Whereupon poor Stewart succumbed again in resigned bewilderment.

Meanwhile it was made evident that Mac had not neglected to order an appetizing breakfast for Archie and himself, and the lad, who had been wondering when the call for mere creature comforts would prevail over the friendly badinage of his host and new-found companion, was rather surprised to observe that the waiter who now arrived came to fulfil an order and not to receive one. In a few minutes a fresh table was prepared, and the two sat down to do justice to the good things provided, while Stewart, ensconcing his lanky form in a comfortable chair by the fire, drew forth his pipe, and soon began to puff out evil-smelling fumes therefrom. And as his eyes followed the curling clouds of smoke that leisurely diffused around to besmirch the freshness of the atmosphere, his thoughts assumed a

reminiscent turn, so that his hearers in due course were treated to some passing strange tales of adventure in the Arctic Circle, and many moving episodes in the life of the narrator.

Archie was more than interested; he was enthraled with the spirit of romance so set before him, and the more charmed he grew, so did further thrilling dramatic sketches fall the more earnestly from Stewart's lips. The youth did not notice the while that Mac was paying but scant attention to the stories related by his doughty companion, yet so it was; yea, further than this, an onlooker might have observed the swart cloud of some indefinable resentment gather on his open features, and noted that his forced grunt of approval, when directly referred to, sounded suspiciously like an uncompromising snarl. The climax came at last.

"Ay, my lad," Stewart intoned dreamily, concluding his most daring effort, "I wrestled wi' that bear for nearly an hour before I got a chance to reach for my knife. It looked as if he knew exactly where I carried the toothpick too, an' every time I reached doon to draw that fourteen inches o' cauld steel from my boot, the savage animile would gie me an extra hard squeeze. . . . I was sorry for that bear; he made a grand fecht." He sighed reflectively. Then did Archie become aware that all was not as it should be with Mac. That worthy gentleman, during the grim narrative, had been gulping down his breakfast somewhat hurriedly, and now, at the conclusion of the harrowing tale, he bolted the last fragment on his plate and turned a fierce face on the reminiscent one.

" Are you no' ashamed o' yoursel'? " he exploded wrathfully. " Have you nae regard whatsoever for the grand an' glorious principles o' truth an' righteousness, you — you whale? "

Stewart smiled blandly, and waved a deprecating hand.

" Your choice o' language is no' up to the auld standard, Mac," said he thoughtfully.

" After listening to your injudicious an' innocuous remarks —— "

" Ay, that's better. But what was wrang wi' the bear story? I'm thinkin' you're getting gey hard to please, Mac, my man. You see, if I hadna killed the bear, the revengfu' quadrooped would hae slauchtered me."

" Do you mean to say that you were speaking o' facts? " demanded Mac sternly.

" I was the only man that escaped to tell the tale," sadly murmured the raconteur. " I'm sair grieved that you should doubt me. I'm — I'm hurt in my maist tender feelings."

Archie was visibly impressed; not so the doubting Mac, however; he gazed suspiciously at his mournful confrère for a moment with further words of wrath trembling on his lips, but he relented before they were uttered.

" You seraphic-faced baboon," he remarked gently instead, " I didna doubt you for one instant. I was sure ——"

" Yes, and so was I," agreed Archie, breaking in on Mac's deliberate speech with purposeful intent.

Stewart beamed. " I'll mak' no more comment," *said he.*

Archie soon discovered that his odd pair of friends were men of action as well as past masters in the art of delicate innuendo. They were evidently both good examples of the roving Scot, but while Mac only occasionally spoke in accents suggestive of Caledonia, Stewart sternly refused to modify his language, which was almost aggressively Scotch. Indeed, it seemed to Archie that he was one of those " touch me who dare " sort of men, emblematical of his country, whose speech would even become more pronounced the farther from his native land he wandered. But it was not alone their quaint choice or words or manner of expression that attracted Archie to the couple. Unaccountably he felt drawn to them; something deeper and stronger far in their seeming complex natures appealed to his own growing manhood. Throughout the earlier part of the day they were attentive and kind to him in a myriad little ways. As prospective companions on an ocean voyage they explained that it was only natual they should keep together, and, as the boy soon realized, this arrangement was one altogether in his favor.

Thus it happened that when the Royal Mail steamship *Campania* steamed out of the Mersey that afternoon, she bore the strangely met trio on her deck, and Archie as he gazed with dim eyes at the fast-receding shores of old England could not but feel profoundly thankful that his lot at this, the final parting of the way, was not so friendless and solitary as he had anticipated. After all, he was but a boy, though over-early cares had matured the fresh young face beyond its years, only a boy

with a boy's hopes and fears, yet with a man's resolve and determination. Go, brave young heart, go forth on your mission. In sadness or in joy, in success or in failure, may the good God watch over you and keep you free from ill.

So surely when a boy makes his first essaying flight out into the greater world, so surely does his heart fill with longing for the dear ones left behind. It is not in nature for youth to hide its deeper feelings by forcing the careless smile of indifference; in later years the wanderer may successfully convey to the outside world an impression of happy-go-lucky cheerfulness the while his heart is sad and lonely and weary with longing; but the young traveller can have no such empty subterfuge. Archie thought no one could guess the misery he was striving to hide, and, among the more or less callous passengers around him, it was unlikely that many would trouble to notice any signs of the boy's inward struggle. Filled with an odd desire to be alone, he sought the least-frequented part of the deck, and there, half-hidden by a lifeboat, he took up a solitary position, and surveyed with abstracted gaze the swiftly rushing green waters. Already an impromptu concert had been started in the music-room, and the tinkling of the ship's piano reached his ears dully above the sound of a rising breeze. But he did not stir from his place. "I will succeed! I will succeed!" he repeated to himself, fighting valiantly against his swelling emotion. Half an hour passed, then a friendly touch on his shoulder caused him to look round with quivering lips. It was Mac who stood before him, his strange-natured friend,

Mac, with a world of kindliness shining out from his steady blue eyes.

"I've been looking for you, Archie, my lad, he began, then his voice grew softer. "I know the feeling, Archie, though it's many years since I first experienced it. Bear up, my boy, you're young enough to start out on a journey like this, but your heart will carry you through."

The kindly words touched the boy at once. "You have been very good to me," he said rather brokenly. "I — I suppose it is usual to feel a bit miserable at first. But why should you think of me at all? You don't know me or anything about me, or where I am going or ——"

"My lad," interrupted the other, "I have travelled in many parts of the world, and have met all kinds of people. I make no claim to be blessed with any special kind o' virtue, but it so happens that my sympathies aye go out to any young laddie I may meet that is making a struggle towards some good purpose. You need tell me nothing, Archie, but let me help you where I can. Mac, the wandering engineer, may get the name o' bein' a tough an' desperate sort o' individual, but nobody can say he ever was guilty o' breakin' a trust, or deceivin' his fellow man."

Archie nodded. His silence was more potent than words. Many men he too had met even in his brief career, and he was wondering whether, after all, he might have misjudged some of them, whether a few also might have had kind and even generous hearts hidden beneath their brusque exteriors. The thought brought much in its train. "And you are an en-

gineer?" he said at length. "My father was an engineer; years ago he built bridges in South America and Australia."

"Dick Ralston," murmured Mac quietly.

"Why, did you know him?" cried the boy eagerly.

"He was good to me when I was down on my luck. He took me on without asking questions at a time when I was much in need. What he did for me I'll gladly do for his son on the same understanding. There is something greater than coincidence in this."

And so it seemed, and Archie's spirits rose considerably as he realized that the kindly Scot had been his father's friend. Long they talked together, and when the time for turning in came the boy's gloomy thoughts had all disappeared. After the first night at sea his new suroundings began to interest him deeply, and when Queenstown had been left a day behind his naturally cheerful disposition had regained its full supremacy. To him the different types among the passengers formed a subject for fascinating study. There was the American millionaire who had worked himself up from some more or less lowly position to the proud eminence he now held as a king of industry. His quiet and unassuming manner bespoke the man of action rather than of words. His antithesis was to be found in the noisy-tongued German Jew stockbroker who had already made himself a feature in the smoke-room. Then there was the skipper of a schooner who was going out to join a new vessel at San Francisco; his bluff personality marked him out at once as a seafaring *man even before* he had ventured the information.

Actors, lawyers, soldiers, clergymen, members of the English nobility — indeed all kinds and classes of people appeared to be represented on the *Campania's* passenger list. One or two there were whom Archie could not place — even their nationality was very doubtful, for they could adapt their speech in a most astonishing manner. Their one absorbing interest was card playing for high stakes, and many times Archie would sit near them in the smoke-room when it was too stormy to go on deck, and watch with a kind of awe their reckless handling of what seemed like small fortunes in gold. On these occasions his friends Mac and Stewart were usually to be found engrossed in a game of draughts somewhere near at hand.

So far the weather had been rather boisterous, and few people had yet recovered their sea legs sufficiently to be about, a matter which considerably surprised the boy, for he himself had been in no way affected by the ship's rolling, and did not quite realize that his immunity from the dreaded seasickness marked him as an exception to the rule. As for the draught players, they behaved as if nothing short of a collision was likely to disturb their equanimity.

During the afternoon of the third day out from the Irish port, Archie noticed that the gamblers had added one more — a fifth — to their party, a tall young American who was apparently returning home after having holidayed extensively in Europe. Mac observed the newcomer also, and a curious smile crossed his features as the young man took his place among the others.

" I think it would be almost richt to give him a hint," he grunted, *sotto voce*, to Stewart.

" It isna our funeral," returned Stewart calmly, without looking up, and Archie, hearing these remarks, was much mystified.

The play proceeded, and within a few minutes it was evident that the latest addition to the party was faring rather badly. Then abruptly there came a striking climax to the scene. A card fluttered as if by accident out of one of the men's hands, and fell face upwards on the floor. The careless one at once dived after it, but the card he placed back with his own was not the one which had fallen. The young onlooker became vaguely conscious that something unfair had happened; he did not know what game the men were playing, but in that one moment he was given a vivid insight into the awful hideousness of a gambler's life, and there rushed over him an overwhelming resolve never to touch a card as long as he lived. He arose from his seat, and was on the point of walking away, when the cool and even voice of the American arrested his movement.

" I say, young man, would it disgruntle you va-ry much to tell me the name of that bit of pasteboard which fell from the extremely awkward hand of this — gentleman opposite me? "

In an instant the original quartette were on their feet, and words of fierce anger flowed from their lips; but the object of their wrath continued suavely:

" If I have made a mistake, — gentlemen, I shall most freely apologize, but I ra—ther calculate I'm on the right side of the street this time. I'm not so verdant a peach as you take me for, and if the young

lad's testimony bears me out, I guess I'll ask the captain to tack a proper label on your backs until we arrive at New York."

"If you say a word," hissed one of the group, turning on Archie savagely, "I'll ——"

"I reckon you won't," interrupted the tall accuser grimly.

It all happened so quickly that the boy could scarcely realize that he had unwittingly been drawn into a dispute involving the direst consequences. Before he could speak, however, Mac's burly form edged between him and the malcontents.

"I don't believe in a laddie being dragged into a question o' this sort," said he, addressing himself to the complainant.

The few passengers who had clustered around murmured a hearty assent.

"You are quite right, friend," agreed the young American, "but as he was the only one who could see the circus ——"

"My man," interjected Mac impatiently, "do you think we're all blind? Let it be a lesson to you."

And now the resentment of the aggrieved four was turned furiously on the mediator, who eyed them with a glance of quiet contempt, and when their violent denunciations were at their fullest, and he felt Stewart's sinewy form close up beside him, the door of the room opened, and the captain entered.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said he, "what is the meaning of this unseemly disturbance? I simply will not allow this sort of thing to occur on board my ship. Oh, you are there, Mr. Knight," ad-

dressing the American, " and — Ah! "— he caught a glimpse of the averted faces of the four — " I see; the same old trouble. — Mr. Purser! "

" Yes, sir," responded that official, who had just then entered the doorway.

" I see we have the group with us again. You ought to have recognized them, sir. Post up the usual notice to passengers to beware of such men. I gave you credit for better judgment, Mr. Knight."

He turned on his heel without another word and strode away, and at the same time the four disgraced gamblers quietly made their exit.

" They are old offenders, gentlemen," explained the harassed purser wearily to the remaining passengers. " Such people are a blight on the Atlantic service. The young and inexperienced travellers are usually their prey, for they rarely know enough to detect the cheat."

" I guess I cut my wisdom teeth before now," remarked Mr. Knight with a smile. " But I'm going to give cards the cold shoulder after this experience."

As if with one accord everyone moved out towards the deck, Archie and his two companions bringing up the rear.

" A breath o' fresh air is vera needfu' after that," yawned Stewart. " But Mac, my dear friend, I tr-rembled for your safety that time."

" It was for Archie's sake I showed them up," returned the doughty one calmly. " It's a very wise thing, I'm thinkin', to show a young lad what to avoid in his career."

And Archie could only respond by pressing the rough hand of his protector and mentor. It was his

first experience in the greater world. It would not be without its influence.

Up to this time the boy had kept his own counsel concerning the object of his journey, though it cannot be denied he felt sorely tempted at times to unburden himself to his companions. On their side they had spoken most openly of their past experiences and exploits; indeed their amusingly told tales had attracted the lad most powerfully. He felt that he was in the company of a pair of true Bohemian wanderers, simple and sincere, yet with a wonderful intuitive capacity, and beyond their playful jocularities he could often detect the ring of sterner manhood. After the first night at sea Mac had resumed his old happy-go-lucky manner and expression, and Stewart and he seemed to find an endless subject for conversation to take up their mutual time when Archie was not there; but in numberless little ways they had both contrived to show him kindness, and the episode in the smoke-room was the climaxing effort which scattered the young traveller's reticence to the wind. In that short moment whatever doubts may have been flitting through his mind were dispelled forever. So it happened that that same afternoon he told his story to the twain, told them of the vicissitudes of Ralston Brothers as a firm, and of his own resolve to take upon himself the difficult mission on which he was now engaged.

"I did not think it would be so very hard to succeed," he concluded, "but I am beginning to get nervous about it. I — I ——"

"And you will, my boy," spoke Mac gravely. "And what is more, Stewart and I will help you."

" Ay, we'll spare a week for that," grunted Stewart, " afore we go on the lang white trail, what leads — what leads — noo, Mac, can ye no' supply a poetic finish for that bonnie sentence? "

" What's wrong with Parnassus? " demanded Mac after some thought. " The trail leading to the heights o' Parnassus should be white and bonnie enough — near the top. But that is a diversion, Stewart. To put it in vera straight and vera brief language, Archie, I'll be engineer under your guidance, and build and demonstrate the process with success, if it is possible for mortal man to do it."

" An', of course, I'll render maist invaluable service scouting around wi' a knife in my teeth an' a cannon in my fist to keep a' thing safe," murmured Stewart with dreamy satisfaction.

" Do you mean to say that you will delay your own work in order to help me ? " cried Archie in glad wonderment.

" Ay, surely! " drily returned Mac. " Our mission is even more pro-blematical and uncertain than yours, laddie, an' a week's delay shouldn't make much difference. Anyway," he continued, rising from the deck chair in which he had been seated, and gazing over the darkening waters with a strange expression in his eyes, " you are in need of friends, that's enough for Stewart an' me."

Archie's eyes dimmed with gratitude as he strove to express his thanks. Then Stewart lifted up his voice enticingly.

" If it's a bargain, Archie, say nae mair aboot it; I'm just burstin' to tell you a grand story aboot whales, an' bears, an'— an' flyin' fishes."

Mac turned round at once. " Your yarn can keep for a bit," he reproved sternly. " I'm going to tell Archie a vera different kind o' story."

" But you surely wouldna keep back my maist moving inspiration, Mac? " pathetically entreated the rebuked one. " I'll never be able to get my bear to growl as weel again, an'——"

" A good many years ago," began Mac calmly, " two young lads used to go to school together — a wee country school in — but that doesn't matter. They were both unfortunate little beggars from the start. The first youngster's father was chief engineer o' a ship that sailed bravely away from the Clyde and never reached its destination. The other lad's father was second mate on the same ship. As is the rule in such cases, a lot o' sympathy was expended on the owners o' the vessel, but the widows o' the men that went down at their posts were little thought of, and in the village where these two lads lived even sympathy was vera sparingly dispensed. You've no doubt read aboot the ideal village life, Archie — some vera famous books have been written to show how angelic are the natures o' the folk that live far away from the towns, — but that sort o' thing is good enough for story-books, because the real facts wouldna seem poetic enough."

Mac paused, and a red gleam appeared in his eye; when he continued his voice was calmer.

" The early recollections o' these laddies were o' sadness and despair; their brave mothers tryin' hard to provide for their wants and keep them at school, scrimping themselves, I believe, o' even the necessities o' life that the youngsters should have a fair

chance in the world. But the lads themselves, young as they were, seemed to understand. They left school at an age when most folk begin to learn, and they tackled the big world in their own vera insignificant way; but their earnings, though only a trifle, were not to be despised. They grew up, and one of them shipped off to sea in a whaler, the other put in his time at marine engineering as did his father before him, and soon he sailed away too, though in the opposite direction. They got home again in a year with money enough saved to keep their old mothers in comfort until they should come back after another voyage, and year after year these two used to return regularly and compare their notes o' travel in far-distant lands. In this time the sailor lad had been up in the Arctics and in Canada, the engineer had been all over the Southern Hemisphere.

"Then Stewart's — I mean the sailor's — mother died, and the next I knew was that he had sailed away on an Arctic exploring ship. Soon after the engineer's mother died, after seeing an account of the wreck of his vessel on the Brazilian coast, and all hands drowned. As it happened, he had left the ship at Rio on the voyage before, and she hadn't had time to know. After that the world didn't seem big enough for him, and he kept wandering around in all the odd corners of the earth without knowing exactly what he wanted. But the years have a healing influence, Archie, and in time, when he saw a newspaper cutting saying that his old friend's ship had returned from its Arctic work, he steered back to meet him. He came up from the South Seas to Victoria on his way home, and there he got an inkling

that some wonderful gold strikes had been made in Alaska, somewhere on the Yukon River. That was enough; when he got to Liverpool he wired to his old comrade to join him on a desperate adventure, not even tellin' him then what it was, with the result that the red-headed Eskimo came down at once."

He ceased abruptly, and Stewart raised his head, showing a face struggling with a deep emotion.

"I forgi'e you the kindly epithet, you — you auld rhinoceros," he murmured feebly. "You an' me hae been sorrowfu' pilgrims for a lang time, but the dangers o' the white trail will soon bring back the auld enthus-iasm."

Archie looked on, deeply touched and bewildered. "You have told me the history of your own lives," he began.

"Yes, laddie, I didn't mean to make it so plain, but after all I couldn't hide it. I was just three days in the old land this time. I went to coax Stewart to come with me. He didn't need coaxin' and now together we are goin' on an expedition that suits us both. It's not the gold altogether we seek, Archie, it's the excitement and adventure, which is now almost part o' our lives. We are an odd pair, but ye mustna mind our idiosyncrasies —— "

"A maist splendiferous word, Mac," interjected Stewart with much appreciation.

"And now, Archie," continued Mac, "you know one reason for us wishing to help you. Do you trust us? "

"With all my heart," fervently answered the boy, "and — and," he added wistfully, "I wish I were going with you."

CHAPTER III

SOAPY SAM

THE western-bound train from New York, Chicago and St. Paul drew slowly into the station at Spokane, that wonderfully up-to-date mining city on the Pacific Slope, and from the long corridored carriages a medley of people issued forth to ease their cramped limbs by a hurried walk on the platform in the few minutes allotted them at this point by the Great Northern Railway's timetable. Among the travellers who intended to resume their journey onwards to Seattle it was not difficult to recognize Archie, Mac, and Stewart. The last two seemed sprightly as ever, despite their long and tedious journey across the prairie, but Archie's eyes showed the strain of many sleepless nights and over-much thought. He had learned a good deal since leaving home, and now that his destination was near, he felt his courage all too ready to slip from him in the face of the nervous trial before him.

Backwards and forwards they walked, talking earnestly, and for a time they did not seem to notice that they were being subjected to close scrutiny every time they passed by an odd-looking individual standing in an attitude of leisurely carelessness on the outside edge of the crowd. The apparently interested

watcher was assuredly not an attractive figure. He was short in stature, but not so short as one might imagine from a hasty first impression, for his great breadth across the shoulders, and a pair of abnormally long arms, detracted considerably from his height. His face, broad and red as an Indian's, was adorned with a pug nose and two keen ferrety eyes of no particular color. But his hair was his crowning glory; it overflowed in a straggling fringe beyond the confines of his sombrero, and showed matted and fiery red in the fading sunlight. Altogether it was an absurd-looking personage that stood in the shadows regarding the trio with wakeful glance. At last Archie caught sight of the uncouth figure, and gave a start of surprise.

"What a strange type of man that is!" he said. "Did you see him, Mac?"

"See him!" echoed Mac. "Ay, and I think he's an individual I've seen before out Victoria way. I've been wondering whether it's you or me he's interested in. He's an ugly sort o' sinner, and I'm thinking that he'll poison the landscape if he shows himself abroad vera often."

Stewart at once became deeply interested. "Whaur is the fortunate gorilla that earns such an extraordinar' compliment frae you, Mac?" he demanded, glancing eagerly around. But at that instant the "All aboard!" bell clanged out, and in the hurry to regain their places Stewart's interest in the stranger was temporarily forgotten.

Now the car in which the three friends were seated was not by any means crowded, indeed there were several empty double seats on either side of the

central passage-way; yet no sooner had they taken their places than a man slid noiselessly into the one vacant space opposite Archie, and beside Mac, whose bulk had now perforce to crush itself into much smaller compass than Nature intended, and behold! the newcomer was none other than the man who had just previously been the subject of their remarks.

" I reckon you will have no objections to my company, pardners," said he with cheerful pleasantness.

Stewart looked up, and a grin of pure joy settled on his features. Gravely he rose to his feet, and, with his hand over his heart, performed a most elaborate bow as neatly as his congested environment would permit.

" Well, you aire mighty polite," growled the visitor, evidently much impressed. " Shake, pardner! " Stewart's great paw shot forth at once, and in silence they shook.

Meanwhile Archie looked on, much mystified, and Mac's rising wrath was near to bubbling over.

" Yes, you aire mighty polite," repeated the unwelcome one thoughtfully.

Stewart positively chuckled. " Every time I meet an uglier man than mysel'," he murmured blandly. ' I like to shake hands wi' him. Your face must be a gey sad misfortune to you, my man, an' I'm moved wi' a deep sympathy for you."

Archie shuddered at the coolly spoken words, fearing immediate trouble. Mac expanded his broad chest and yawned impatiently; but he to whom the unkind sentiment was addressed laughed long and loudly, apparently in no wise offended. Then Mac turned upon him sourly. " When you've finished

cackling like a blue hyena," he began grumpily, " you'll maybe hae the goodness to transport your ungainly anatomy somewhere else. I vera strongly object to being crushed like a bandbox unnecessarily."

A curious expression glittered in the beadlike eyes of the stranger, and his hand seemed to drop involuntarily to his side, but with a laugh he regained his *sang froid*. " I'm a — a peaceful sort o' chap, and I bear no ill will, pard," he answered with a smile that was akin to a snarl, " but I like your company, an' I reckon I'll get out jest when it suits me."

" Make it two minutes," suggested Mac in gentle tones. Unabashed, the other took a newspaper from his pocket, and appeared to study it intently. After a very brief interval he tossed the sheet to Archie. " If your inclinations are hitched on in the mining direction, young fellow," he remarked, " you'll find something to interest you there. Some chicken of a Britisher is coming out here to paint things blue, and take the yellow dirt away from under our noses."

Archie was startled in spite of himself. Was his mission, after all, then, public property? He took up the paper at once and glanced over it hastily. Then his face flushed with vexation as his eye caught the heavily-leaded heading: " Hope for the West. Great Gold Discovery. Young Inventor is Coming." When he had finished reading, the man who had been seated opposite was no longer in evidence. Silently as he had come he had removed himself, not only to another seat, but to another carriage as well.

"Ay, our friend with the angelic countenance has vamoosled," said Mac, noting Archie's look of surprise. "An' I can assure you I was conscious o' a wonderful relief when he took up his bed and walked. I'll even admit that, had he not eased me o' the burden o' his presence, I would have been sore tempted to lay violent hands on him."

"He was a real guid-natured sort o' chiel," rebuked Stewart. "I wunner that you could be so unceevil to the man, and after a' my kindly overtures too."

"Recollect, my man," returned Mac sternly, "that I haven't been accustomed to sittin' on a masthead like you. I need a fair bit o' space whereon to flap myself — but what's the matter, Archie? You look a bit troubled."

Silently the boy handed over the newspaper with its glaring headlines, and this was what Mac read: "An Important Discovery in connection with gold and its ores has been made by two young English inventors of the name of Ralston. By some wonderful chemical apparatus they appear to have mastered the art of separating the metal from all sorts of refractory compounds and segregated deposits. Though we doubt that such an appliance is feasible on a large scale, it must be eminently suitable for working rich alluvial deposits where water for sluicing is scarce; for we understand the gold is precipitated into a vat by the evolutions of gases from the ore in a dry state." Then followed a scientific discourse on chemical discoveries in general, which occupied the greater part of the column, but at the conclusion of the article these lines appeared:

" The inventor of Ralston's Process arrived in New York by the *Campania*, and thus may be expected to reach this district to-day, or to-morrow at latest. It is believed he is going direct to the Union Gold Mines north of Seattle."

Mac laid down the enterprising news sheet and whistled softly to himself. " They seem to be very well posted as to your patent and your arrangements, Archie," he said questioningly. " Did you happen to tell anybody? "

" Not a soul," answered the lad wearily. " I wrote to the Company, of course, the mail before I left home."

" That would be enough. Some bright young spark in the office has seen your letter, and of course, as the contents were o' a private nature, he was forced to turn himself into a newspaper correspondent at once. But they seem to know all about the process; surely you didn't convey that information in a letter? "

Archie laughed. " What is said about the Process is just nonsense," he replied. " As for the apparatus itself, even I do not understand some parts of its construction, and if anything happened to the model I could never get another made."

" But of course you have a plan? " suggested Mac anxiously.

" No, I destroyed it after leaving Liverpool. I — I threw it overboard. It made me nervous to think that anyone might ever get it from me."

" Ah well, Archie, it means that Stewart and me must see you through at all costs! This is a great country, and a free country; its main fault, in my

humble opinion, is that it's too free for some o' its inhabitants. Many a ne'er-do-well from our own land comes here an' calls himsel' an American; the worst types o' Europe flourish under the protecting banner o' Stars and Stripes, and their iniquities are usually credited to the country o' their adoption — "

" You're gettin' gey long-winded, Mac," broke in Stewart impatiently. " Do you think Archie or me wants chunks o' knowledge shot oot at us like — like dynamite bombs oot o' a cannon? An' can we no' take good care o' oor pro-tegy in this sinfu' country as weel as we might do in circumspeck and righteous England — I mean Scotland? Show me the desp'rit backslider I canna squelch, an'— an' I'll weep on his neck an' droon him in my sorrowfu' tears."

Having thus struck upon a subject indirectly affording room for much reminiscent discussion, the cheerful pair promptly proceeded to make the most of it as a medium for unloading from their well-stocked memories many and various incidents and experiences which were supposed to elaborate the iniquities of mankind in general when freed from the strict supervision of the law. In fairness to the gifted raconteurs it must be stated that their preliminary efforts of elucidation in this respect had some distant bearing on the question of man's moral rectitude in different environments, but with the ease of born romancists they soon glided into wider realms, and descanted volubly on all sorts and conditions of subjects, rarely failing to provide mutual parallels in support of much wondrous reason and discernment.

Archie, for a time, took a keen interest in the conversation, and gleaned some extensive knowledge concerning the habits of South American Indians, Eskimos, bears, tigers, crocodiles, and snakes. Incidentally he was made aware for the first time of many strange features in the geological and geographical worlds, and while the general interest was settled in this quarter he took occasion to ask sundry questions, and put forward his own views in a mildly hesitating manner, after which he was amused to notice a more wary trend in the conversation and a guileful changing of the theme. Finally, in the midst of a learned oration from Mac on the topic of grubs and butterflies, he dropped off to sleep, and straightway began to dream of tropical forests, glittering icebergs, hostile natives, and savage animals, all set in a kaleidoscopic picture around him. He stood alone in the midst of this motley fantasy alternately shivering and perspiring, pondering out a way of escape, and, as he hesitated, a deep growling from the denizens of the forest warned him of threatening danger. He turned and fled precipitately, and the disconcerting sounds in the rear became subdued to a distant murmur. Then suddenly he found himself facing the dull blue wall of an awkwardly placed iceberg; and, horror of horrors! a great polar bear was seated on a glassy ledge near at hand, eying him with contemplative satisfaction. He drew back hurriedly, then a dreadful, low growl filled the air, gradually swelling in intensity until it seemed to Archie as if his ears must burst. After that, curiously enough, the distracting echoes became mellowed down considerably, and

behold! the deep tones of a man's voice penetrated to his inner consciousness.

" I'll no say but what you're right, Stewart, from your own elementary point o' view, but, judging from a high metaphysical attitude, I'm convinced there's no logical basis to your argument. What do you say, Archie? Yes, of course you are o' my opinion."

Archie opened his eyes and looked across at his questioner. It did not need the half-dismayed glint in the wily one's weather optic to convince him that Mac had been aware of his lapse into unconsciousness, and had perhaps been making use of his silent acquiescence more than once to overwhelm the trusting Stewart. So with grave speech and an air of profound wisdom he replied: " I cannot say that I can agree on that subtle point, Mac. You see, I have studied metaphysics —— "

" Ho! ho! ho! " laughed Stewart. " I think, I really think you'd better get back to the subject o' the Pampas, Mac."

" An' you'd be safer clutching on to the North Pole, you green-eyed lobster," retorted his compatriot mildly, " than trying to swim on the bottomless depths o' scientific argument."

Then there was peace for a short space.

Seattle was reached at last, Seattle, the beautiful port of Washington, which some years before had been almost completely destroyed by fire. Amid a babel of sound from the clanging vari-toned bells of locomotives engaged in shunting, the Western Mail drew into the terminus, which was nothing more nor less than an open street, and stood still, the

gigantic engine puffing tempestuously after its herculean labors. Archie was rather surprised at this abrupt method of arrival. In England even the smallest village can boast a station with a platform of some kind, and he was rather used to associating the magnitude of a town with the magnificence of its station; but certainly that system could not well be applied in America.

Mac, having a previous knowledge of the town, had already fixed upon an hotel at which the three might stay until further arrangements were made, and no time was lost in having the checked baggage sent thither, all but the impedimenta connected with the secret process, and this Mac persisted in carrying himself. Thus that afternoon they found themselves occupying a large room in a fairly commodious establishment which rejoiced in the homely sounding title of New England House. With scarce any delay Archie made enquiries and found that the Union Gold Mines were situated some twenty miles distant on the line connecting with Vancouver, and having further learned that a train would leave for that quarter on the following morning, he possessed his soul in patience and went off to write a long letter home. His two friends, meanwhile, had entered into congenial conversation with the proprietor, who, oddly enough, despite his admittedly long residence in the Golden West, spoke with an accent suggestive of the land of brown heath and shaggy wood.

Altogether Archie felt rather pleased with himself as he sat in his room and penned his thoughtful letter, and he did not omit to add a glowing tribute to his two sturdy friends, who were even then awaiting

him downstairs with a startling tale upon their lips.

He had nearly completed his correspondence when he was surprised to notice his door pushed gently open, and immediately afterwards a man's head became framed in the aperture, only, however, to be instantly withdrawn.

"Hullo! Well, that is curious," said Archie, rising and walking out into the passage. No one was in sight, but he thought he heard the door of the adjacent room close with a slight jar. "Someone mistaken his number," muttered the lad; "but he didn't need to be so very silent about it all the same." He returned to his work, but not many minutes passed before he was again disturbed, this time by a sharp knock on the outside panel. "Come in!" he cried, thinking it was one of the hotel attendants; but in answer to his summons a tall, dark-bearded man entered and nonchalantly sat down on the top of the case containing Ralston's Process. Archie stared at him in some amazement, but the intruder calmly proceeded to light a cigarette and said never a word.

"I say," complained the youth, "don't you think you have made a mistake. I am sure I don't know you. I don't know anyone here."

The stranger smiled. "There's nary mistake, I guess; at least I reckon there ain't. Do you answer to the handle o' Ralston?"

"You've hit it, sir," admitted Archie, "but, as I said before, I don't know anyone in Seattle."

The tall man whiffed at his cigarette thoughtfully for a moment, then, suddenly diving his hand into an inner pocket, he produced a letter, and with much

solemnity delivered it over. "The boss said I had to be kerful 'bout it, as it was an all-fired important dockyment," he remarked confidentially.

With interest now considerably aroused, the lad tore open the envelope and extracted therefrom a single sheet of plain paper, on which was written in a clerkly hand:

"A. RALSTON, Esq.

"SIR: — I shall be glad if you will spare time to call on me this afternoon before five o'clock. I have something of considerable interest to communicate affecting the welfare of your Gold Process. I am staying at the Rainier Grand Hotel.

"Yours, etc.,

"THOMAS A. WALKER,

"Director, Union Gold Mines."

Archie's face blanched. "I wonder what it means," he thought to himself. Aloud he said: "I didn't know that any of the Union Company's officials were in Seattle. I suppose I had better — yes, that's all right. Tell Mr. Walker I will call on him before five."

The lengthy one gathered himself up lazily. "All right, young man, I'll convey the news instanter." With his hand on the door handle he hesitated and added: "And by the way, mister, be sure and lock your door before leaving. There's a healthy lot o' thieves around this here city just now." He vanished, and Archie, hastily finishing his letter, sealed it in an envelope and prepared to go downstairs. "I'm a bit worried over that man's mention of thieves," he

muttered, as he went out, " and I will certainly not forget to lock the door." He carefully turned the key, then hastened on his way.

In the hall he found Mac and Stewart evidently in a state of considerable excitement. " As I thought, Archie, just as I thought," the former whispered hoarsely, " there's goin' to be a big gold rush to the Yukon, and — and — " He noticed the look of disappointment on the boy's face, and continued gravely: " But we'll see you through your trouble first, lad —— "

" Ay, that we will," concurred Stewart with a doleful sigh.

Alas! How great is the power of gold to attract, how mystic is the spell it weaves. Archie saw at once how the spirit of adventure possessed his friends; they had heard the call of the unknown, and their hearts went questing forth in answer to the summons.

" I will not have you break your plans for me," murmured the lad brokenly, albeit he could not for the moment realize how he was to succeed without their aid and kindly companionship.

" Laddie, laddie," said Mac softly, " we'll stay with you because we want to stay; not for all the gold in Canada will we forsake you at this time."

Then Archie showed them the note he had received. " Perhaps it may be very important," he said, " and as it is near five o'clock now, I had better go along at once and see what he wants."

" You're goin' to see naebody in this city withoot my company," declared Stewart impressively. " I've noticed ane or twa vera desp'rit lookin' customers

knockin' about, an' it behoves me to see that my bonnie wee rib-tickler is whaur it ought to be."

He bent down and carefully pulled up his right trouser leg, disclosing the fact that he wore knee-boots underneath, and from a receptacle within the high leathern side of his footwear he, to the boy's horror, pulled a fourteen-inch blade of flashing steel, and regarded it with much satisfaction.

" Yes, we'd better go with you, Archie," agreed Mac quietly, and together they walked out of the hotel.

Now the Rainier Grand Hotel was the full length of the main street away, and it took a good ten minutes to negotiate the distance; but they arrived a few minutes before five nevertheless, and immediately enquired at the office for Mr. Walker.

" Mr. Walker! " The spruce ledger clerk eyed his visitors suspiciously for a moment, then glanced over his list of names in the book. " There ain't no such individual in this house, boys," he said definitely.

" But he expects me. It's Mr. Walker, Director of the Union Gold Mines," urged Archie.

The clerk whistled incredulously. " I reckon you are makin' some little mistake, boys. I know Mr. Walker of the Union Company, and I reckon I also know he hasn't been stayin' here for over a month."

Something suspiciously like a forcible expletive issued from Mac's lips, and he turned and dashed for the door. " Come on, Stewart, there's some underhand game in this," he growled.

Stewart paused not a moment, but, breathing dark language, he stretched forth his lanky frame and sped after his companion, and Archie with a vague fear

clutching at his heart, immediately followed in the chase, leaving the young man behind the counter in a state of hopeless bewilderment,

Along the street the three rushed, regardless alike of the wondering stares of pedestrians, and the hoarse calls of the suspicious police. Mac led the way, breasting a passage through intervening crowds by sheer force and weight. Close behind came Stewart, his long limbs stretching over the ground in gigantic strides, and Archie followed up, a good third, marvelling greatly at the wondrous turn of speed so suddenly developed by his associates. They arrived at the New England House almost as one man, and rushed breathlessly upstairs to the room Archie had so recently vacated. Then it was that their unuttered fears were realized. The door which had been so carefully locked stood wide open, and the case containing the secret process had disappeared.

Mac raved in a fierce frenzy, and denounced himself in violent terms. " I ought to have known," he groaned, stamping impotently around the room, " I ought to have suspected that something was wrong."

He stopped in the midst of his self-denunciatory remarks and dashed away to find the proprietor. Stewart, with most woebegone visage, examined every nook and corner in the apartment, murmuring gently to himself the while, and at the conclusion of his fruitless search for an apparatus which, because of its very size, could not possibly have been secreted anywhere near, he went out into the passage and loudly and ambiguously threatened death and disaster to all and sundry who cared to acknowledge implication in the theft. As for Archie, to all out-

ward appearance he was the calmest of the three. After a first despairing exclamation on entering the pillaged room he had not spoken. Quietly he seated himself on a chair, and, pressing a nervous hand to his forehead, seemed to become oblivious for the time to all his surroundings. But had the light been better, Stewart might have noticed the deathlike pallor that showed on the lad's face, and observed his strange fixity of expression. In truth Archie was too overcome for words; his whole being was numbed by the shock of his terrible loss.

In a short time Mac returned with the proprietor of the hotel, to whom he had evidently succeeded in imparting a great deal of his own excitement. A small crowd followed them, and would have come into the room to gratify their idle curiosity had not Stewart's curt and direful threats restrained them.

But the proprietor could say nothing to reassure his guests. " If the concern has gone, boys, it's gone, and I can't bring it back," he reiterated loudly.

Then Mac's temper seethed up, and, despite the fact that but a short time before this man and he had conversed with exceeding friendliness, he turned upon him fiercely with the words: " If you say that again, Mr. Robertson, I'll shake the sawdust out o' you. What I want to know is who has been up here within the last quarter of an hour, an' whom do you suspect? "

Mr. Robertson shrugged his shoulders. " You've got some call to be annoyed, Mr. Mac, but the man who runs a busy house like this can never tell who may come in or go out. As to suspecting anyone, if the stolen case was especially valuable, I reckon

Soapy Sam's gang must have shifted it — that is, if they knew anything about it beforehand. Why, I believe Soapy himself came down the line from Spokane in the very same train you travelled with. He came from Alaska some weeks ago, and, by James! he has been painting this district of ours blue ever since."

"What sort o' man is this Soapy?" demanded Stewart aggressively.

Mr. Robertson glanced mildly at his interrogator. "He's a thick-set thorny-lookin' cuss, and — meanin' no disrespect to you, sir — with red hair and a face as ugly as sin."

Stewart gasped; so amazed was he that he actually failed to make a note of the rude innuendo conveyed. "Mac," he groaned, "it must hae been that man in the train."

Mac nodded gloomily; then Archie spoke for the first time. "That was the man who gave me the paper," he said calmly; "I can understand it all now. He was there on purpose to meet me, and he wanted to be sure that I was the one referred to in the article. It was all arranged beforehand. Well, well, they have got the Process, but without my knowledge it is useless to him, though the loss of the mechanism ruins me, and — and — others."

The proprietor, much distressed, went quietly out of the room, but in a few minutes he returned. "I have just discovered," said he, "that a tall, dark man was seen carrying a case such as you have lost out of the hall door barely half an hour ago. The clerk says he engaged the room next to yours only this afternoon."

"Why, that was the man who gave me the letter," cried Archie, "and he also warned me to lock my door when going out."

"He might well say that," admitted the proprietor with a faint smile, "especially as the key of his own room would have opened your door, or any other door on the landing. This house wasn't built to accommodate thieves, but I'm afraid our quiet little city is harboring too many of that class nowadays. That gold rumor from the Yukon way must have drawn them all here."

While he was speaking, the booking clerk made his appearance in great haste. "I've just been telephoning the police," he explained hurriedly, "and they say that the dark-bearded man is known to them, and that they are aware he is one of Soapy Sam's confederates."

"Oh, how gloriously free is this country!" groaned Mac ironically."

"You must remember it's a big country, stranger," remarked the clerk significantly, "and doubtful characters can pop across from other States when things begin to get warm for them, and it takes some time before our police can get a real solid case against them. You see, Soapy is such a cunning character, and can always manage to wriggle out of a scrape somehow."

"I hope it may be my luck to meet him again some o' these days," was Mac's comment. "He'll have to wriggle pretty hard to get out o' my hands."

Then the visitors departed, leaving the three alone to their sadness. For some time there was a quietness among them that even the usually irresponsible-

tongued Stewart could not be constrained to break, and Mac could think of no word of comfort that would not sound as dull platitudes in the ears of the boy on such a calamitous occasion. "Try and cheer up, Archie, lad," he whispered at length; "we'll maybe find the Process yet."

The boy shook his head miserably. "I don't hope any more," he said in a strange, listless voice; then he added with feverish eagerness: "When you go home again will you tell my brother I did my best? Tell my mother — " He broke off abruptly, and for the moment was completely overcome by his emotion.

"Cheer up, Archie!" cried Stewart in most dolorous tones. "Cheer up — !" He finished off lamely, for indeed it suddenly occurred to him that his own voice sounded dismal enough for a funeral and could have therefore no enlivening effect.

Then Mac tried another plan. "Come away with us and have something to eat, Archie," he said, rising to his feet. "You've had no lunch to-day, and we may as well leave our misfortune to be considered after a good dinner. It's vera wonderful what an influence the stomach exercises over the mind. Come away, lad."

"I'll be with you in a minute," answered Archie in a hoarse voice; "I'll be down very soon after you." He watched them go out, then quickly he arose and walked over to where his portmanteau lay. Kneeling down he feverishly undid the straps and slid back the metal catches, and groped within the opened case for a few seconds. When he slowly regained his feet a small shining instrument glittered

"HE FELT HIS WRIST GRIPPED AS IF IN A VICE."

in his hand. " Only a boy," he muttered derisively, " I'm only a boy, and of course am not expected to understand anything or feel anything. I'm only a boy, but I'll not go slobbering back after making a mess of things. I'm only a boy who has taken on a man's work, and — " He raised his hand to his head, and as he did so a slight noise behind startled him, and immediately he felt his wrist gripped as if in a vise.

" You may be only a boy, lad, but you'll finish your work like a man, an' not like a coward! " It was Mac's voice that he heard; it was Mac's great horny hand that dislodged the small Smith & Wesson revolver from his trembling fingers.

" I thought you had gone downstairs," he murmured weakly.

Mac put the deadly little weapon in his pocket.

" I waited at the door, lad," said he with odd gentleness. " Sometimes it's no' safe to leave a man alone when he's in trouble, and you, poor laddie, have had more than you can bear. I'm not good at preachin', Archie, being a hard and maybe sinful man myself, but I want you to play the game to a finish, act the man and fight to the last. Mind, there's few among us who haven't sorrows to contend with."

The boy's eyes glistened for the first time. " Thank you! " he said simply.

Mac took the revolver from his pocket and handed it back without a word; then together they walked down to the hall, where they found Stewart awaiting them with a very anxious expression on his big, ruddy-hued face. " I've got a sort of feeling that

I wouldna object very strongly to havin' something to eat," he suggested plaintively.

"A grand idea, Stewart, my man," admitted Mac, "but no' vera original. However, we'll proceed to put it into practice."

They were moving towards the dining-room, when the shrill clamor of hurrying newsboys arrested their attention. Louder and louder grew the din as the youthful emissaries of the Press drew near. Surely something unusual had happened to cause the uproar. "Can you hear what they are crying, Archie?" asked Mac curiously. "Your ears are maybe sharper than mine."

But just then high above the babel of sound rose one clear voice, and this was the nature of its strain: "*Seattle Post Intelligencer!* Special Edition! Great gold discovery on the Klondike! Rivers paved with nuggets! Gold! Gold! Special Edition!"

"So the news is made public at last," said Mac sorrowfully, "and the rush will start before us after all. That paper will send many a good man to his death among the Arctic snows. I know they can have no more information than I got in Victoria some weeks ago, but of course they'll mak' the most o' it."

"Ay, it's a pity, Mac," agreed Stewart; "but by the time we see Archie through we'll maybe have more definite information about that lang and grisly trail you were speakin' aboot."

"You need not trouble about me now," said Archie brokenly.

Mac uttered an exclamation. "I'd clean forgotten that that miserable, thieving skunk had made all the

difference," he growled. Then a thought seemed to strike him, and with a strange light in his eye he laid his hand on the boy's shoulder. "I wouldn't have dreamed o' sayin' such a thing before, Archie," said he, "but now things are different. One time you said you wished you were goin' with Stewart an' me; now Stewart an' I ask if you'll come. Don't answer quickly; there's maybe danger to be faced on the lang trail, maybe little after all to gain. We must fight with Nature for her guarded treasure, and if we win we despoil no man; while if we lose we go under to a grand enemy."

"You have put it vera sensibly, Mac," said Stewart with much solemnity; "I en-dorse a' ye say."

The boy was silent for almost a minute; his thoughts were far away with those he had left behind in the dear old land. But when he answered, his voice sounded clear and strong, and his eyes glittered with a new light — the light of enthusiastic determination and resolve. "Yes, I'll be proud to come with you," he said; "I'd go anywhere with you, because I trust you both, and from this time onward you will never hear me complain. I shall face danger, and, if need be, death, without snivelling any more."

Mac's weatherbeaten face grew strangely old for a passing moment, and the true man from behind the mask spoke out: "We accept you, laddie, as our comrade on a dangerous mission, because we believe it will be for your good, and because — because we like you. Stewart an' I might feel lonely at times when we get tired miscallin' one another, and you'll be a vera great help to us. With youth, health, an'

strength on your side, please God you'll come to no harm."

"Amen!" grunted Stewart.

The three clasped hands in turn; the compact was made, the compact which bound that trio of dauntless spirits in bonds of noble brotherhood, a brotherhood that would yet make itself felt in the grim northern land where Nature so jealously watched over her kingdom. For of such stuff are the pioneers of our Empire made.

CHAPTER IV

THE BRIDGING OF THE PASS

WHO has not heard of the notorious Chilcoot Pass — that grim, glacier-capped gateway to the Yukon's frozen treasure, which in the early days of the great rush demanded so heavy a toll of human life from those who dared to come within its precincts? For the shortest trail to the sub-Arctic El Dorado led over its cold white steeps and treacherous crevasses. Unprecedented in goldfields history was the wild excitement caused when the first news of Klondike burst upon the world, and unparalleled were the difficulties and dangers of the icebound trail. The brief Northern summer had passed before the frenzied gold-seekers' race began, and the iron grip of winter was on the country even ere the vanguard of Fortune's votaries had arrived under the ominous shadow of the mighty Chilcoot.

So it was that the Indian village of Dyea, on the coast, absorbed multitudes of those who came and were deterred by their first sight of Nature's barrier. Chicken-hearted and cunning many of them were, and since they might not venture over the pass, they settled down in hastily built huts, and pursued what seemed their congenial bent of robbing and cheating the more unwary of their fellow men. Far up the

trail, balancing precariously on the mountainside, the little settlement of Sheep Camp sprang into being some four miles from the top of the pass. It marked the timber limit; beyond not a shrub was to be seen, and here the few hardier would-be miners congregated, with intention to remain until the early summer came round again and bared the pass of its snowy mantle. Here, too, the tougher of the parasitical element soon found a lucrative dwelling place, and the hurriedly erected "Mascotte Saloon" of this frigidly situated little camp quickly earned an unenviable reputation.

From Dyea, eighteen miles of stern climbing along the rocky course of a winding cañon had to be negotiated before the dread summit was reached, but it was the final seven hundred odd feet of ascent that completely subdued the hopes of all who ventured near. Like a great white wall this frowning barrier rose, and no clefts or ledges for foothold could be seen. It was little wonder that this great obstacle to the white man's progress should have disheartened so many eager spirits. Thus far and no farther could they dare, and wearily they retraced their steps down the glacier-fed gorge to Sheep Camp. And now, when the whole world's press was ringing with wonderful reports concerning fresh discoveries in the Klondike land, reports which could not possibly have got through from a country on which King Frost had so securely set his seal, and which emanated, for the most part, from the resourceful brain of a pushing newspaper correspondent at Dyea, when several well-known Western American organs, which ought to have known better, were loudly advising

instant migration of all and sundry to the land of snows and nuggets, the baffled men of Sheep Camp were saying bitter words, and harboring bitter thoughts, against those who had been responsible for their coming at such a time. The heavily logged saloon soon became for them a central attraction. Tents formed but poor shelter against the elements, and timber was too scarce to allow of many huts being built, so, surely, the Mascotte secured its prey, and the proprietor thereof, a German-American Jew, began to prosper mightily.

It was strange that such a dangerous site as that of Sheep Camp should have been chosen for a winter residence. The saloon, which, of course, was the principal erection, sheltered under the giant wing of a colossal glacier which straddled for a considerable distance along the northern ridge of the valley, and from this point, upwards towards the climax of the pass, successive icefields lowered ominously on the darkened vale. But a certain type of man was ever reckless. Familiarity, even with danger, does not fail to breed the proverbial contempt — until dire calamity occurs.

It was here that three bemuffled travellers arrived one evening barely a week after the camp had taken root. The sky was black with scudding clouds, and a fine, sleety snow was beginning to fall.

"Weel, weel, this is a happy home we've struck," grumbled a familiar voice. "I'm getting vera nervish, Mac, my man. I think — I really think I smell icebergs."

"That's a vera useful, if not exactly an ornamental, pro-boscis you've got, Stewart," responded

Mac gruffly, " but it didn't help us much coming up through that cañon. I think it was Archie's eyes that saved us from going sailin' down with the flood more than once."

The youngest member of the party laughed. " The snow made everything clear enough," he said modestly; " but here we are at last. I suppose this is Sheep Camp, though I see only one house lighted."

" You may be sure it's a saloon," grunted Mac, " and with equal logic it may be assumed that there's likely to be a tough lot o' howlers inside. But on the principle o' any port in a storm —— "

" Dinna be so vera elo-quential," reproached Stewart, " but, as the geography book says: ' Lead on, Macsnuff '; an' if ony backslider meddles wi' me he'll sune get enuff — I mean I'll squelch the neck off him. I didna intend to mak' po'try, believe me, it was just my impromptu talent bubbling —— "

" I object to it bubbling," interrupted Mac unsympathetically. " Spit it out altogether, my man, or it'll maybe poison you."

Archie chuckled aloud, but the culprit, nothing daunted, essayed another empyrean flight, which he adroitly succeeded in completing to his own satisfaction before they reached the heavily barricaded doorway of the Mascotte Saloon.

Their entry was greeted by a volley of questions and sundry ill-natured remarks from the odd score of wild-looking men who clustered round a glowing stove set in the centre of the room, and who seemed unreasonably annoyed at having their privacy disturbed.

" Waal, has some other barnacle trap got in from the South? "

" Reckon you've made a mistake comin' this far, strangers."

" We ain't anxious to have any more population in this here camp."

Mac carefully shut the door, and stamped the snow from off his long rubber boots. " Stewart, you — you quarrelsome deevil," he whispered hoarsely in the ear of his now silent compatriot. " Not a word, if you value your life. I've met this sort o' crowd before."

Archie meanwhile had walked forward into the room, throwing off his long glazed waterproof as he did so, and disclosing his well-knit, if youthful frame dressed in the approved garb of the country, but displaying no weapons of any kind.

" The *Rosalie* from Seattle has just got in to Dyea," he said, making himself spokesman for his party lest his more fiery friends should answer less mildly, " and we have come up to look at the pass. They told us at Dyea that we could not get across with our outfits, but we mean to make a try if possible —— "

" Hear the youngster speak," roared an evil-faced individual on whose belt two revolver holsters were suspended menacingly.

" Say, kid, ain't you too far away from home? " asked another similarly armed desperado. A loud guffaw from the assembly gave him encouragement to continue: " You know we don't reckon school-boys have any right in this shebang."

Archie's pride responded to the taunt at once.

" I'm man enough to go where you dare not venture!" he shot out quickly, and the fickle crowd laughed again.

And now an ugly glitter came into the somewhat discomfited man's eyes. If Archie had but known, there is no surer way of irritating this type of creature than by causing the laugh of his associates to be turned against him. He jumped up from the log on which he had been seated, and, with hand on revolver butt, began to walk round the circle towards the object of his wrath. What his real intentions were no one ever knew, for before he had taken two paces he found himself face to face with Mac.

" Ay, you're a vera brave man," spoke the brawny Scot ironically; " but maybe at a pinch you'll not find me too small for your notice."

" I ain't got no quarrel with you," muttered the other surlily, cunningly essaying to draw his revolver under cover of this semi-conciliatory speech; but he found his hand suddenly pinioned in a grip of steel. Mac was not so unobservant as he pretended, and the hapless victim of his own prowess squirmed in agony. " Boys," he cried out savagely, " ye ain't surely goin' to let me be bested by this chump-headed Britisher? "

An angry snarling arose from among the group, and the man who had first spoken to Archie leaped to his feet. " Not by a jugful, Chilcoot Charlie! " he yelled, and for a moment the entire mob seemed to follow him. But out from the crowd there came one voice, sharp and clear. " I am a Canadian, gentlemen, and I like to see fair play. Go on with the

funeral if you like, but you may reckon me against you every time."

He strode forward a tall, slight figure, and ranged himself beside Mac, a desperate-looking revolver bared in each hand. A momentary hush followed, then another of the motley community came over to the minority — a rough enough looking customer he was too.

"I somehow think that down in old Kentucky, whar I was riz, we know how to play the game," he drawled. "I'm with you, my friend."

Meanwhile Archie had ranged himself alongside Mac, who still held a tight grip of his vehemently cursing enemy, and though to all appearance he was unarmed, his hand all the time clutched the stock of his little Smith and Wesson in the depth of his pocket. And now, over such a trifling beginning, a deadly fight seemed imminent. Once the first shot was fired who could foretell what the end would be? Then a strange thing happened. Stewart, who had been silent so long, and whose only obvious weapons were his own great-knuckled fists, gently edged forward into the open, and there, with an expression of absolute unconcern on his features, he drew forth from its hiding place the same long, cruel-looking knife as had horrified Archie on a previous occasion. Seemingly regardless alike of revolver bullets and men, he balanced himself cautiously on one leg and rested his left boot across his knee, then, calmly and methodically, he proceeded to whet the mighty blade on his improvised strop, pausing every now and then to run his thumb along the edge with an air of keen satisfaction.

Half-mesmerized, the onlookers stared in breathless dismay, and as the industrious one became more and more satisfied with his work they retreated back slowly, pursued by the malevolent glance of the operator, over whose face an unlovely grin was beginning to make itself evident. The entire action of this weird interlude occupied barely half a minute, and when at the end of that time Stewart straightened himself up and concentrated his glare on the erstwhile bloodthirsty crew, they broke precipitately and made for the door.

"There's naething like c-cauld steel," murmured the wily one blandly. "And noo, Mac, let that misguided Pharisee get awa' to ponder over his sins, an' I'll try an' persuade the boss o' the shanty to come back an' provide us wi' something to eat. I'm really vera hungry."

And when the subdued band crept doubtfully back, they appeared to have forgotten all about the threatened strife, all but the two whose authority to command their fellows had been ruthlessly shaken, and they eyed the newcomers from a distant corner in a manner that clearly indicated their dully simmering rage.

"I guess you'll want to look out for that pair, strangers," said the American. "They're the toughest couple o' skunks this side o' the pass, and if you need help at any time just holler on me,— Bill Packard is my handle, — and I'll be with you in a couple o' shakes."

"And you can count on me, boys, if need be," said the young Canadian. "My name is Cardwell, Captain Cardwell, at your service, formerly of the

Canadian Mounted Police, but now a disappointed Klondiker like many others. But if it is a fair question, what do you mean to do? The pass is just like a big chunk of ice."

"We'll have a look at that pass before we admit ourselves beat," grunted Mac stubbornly. Then he and his two companions went off to dine on the meagre portion of bacon and beans which had been prepared for them at a tariff that would have made even the manager of a first-class London hotel blush with envy.

This, then, was the nature of our travellers' arrival at Sheep Camp. They had reached Dyea only that morning, after a most adventurous passage north from Seattle in a leaky tub of a vessel that had been hastily requisitioned for the Klondike service, and which only by the will of Providence ultimately reached its destination. During the voyage it had been successful in discovering at least three uncharted rocks — discoveries which might well have had serious results for the unfortunate passengers had the enterprising little ship been gifted with engines capable of driving her more strenuously against them. Surely on this coast, at that time, the race was not always to the swift! The outfit of the three, however, had at last been dumped on the muddy shore of the Dyea inlet, and there it lay while the owners, somewhat depressed by the reports current concerning the impassable nature of the pass, trudged doggedly off to investigate matters for themselves.

And now they had arrived at Sheep Camp. On the morrow they would continue their journey

towards the mist-enshrouded summit, and as they lay down to sleep that night on the rough logged floorway of the saloon, Archie's hopes beat high. He recked lightly of the difficulties which had apparently overcome the many others.

"Perhaps, after all, most of them got frightened when they saw the pass," he whispered to Mac during a waking moment in the long night.

"It's my candid opinion most o' them never saw the pass," answered Mac grimly. "But all the same it must be pretty bad, or Cardwell and Packard would have made a good try to get across. For any sake, Archie, give Stewart a gentle kick on the ribs; he's makin' a most unseemly row."

Archie duly interrupted the snoring one, and in the short respite which followed succeeded in dropping off to sleep again.

It was about noon on the following day when the dauntless three reached the base of the last precipitous climb on the trail known as the "Summit," and the sight that met their gaze was such as would have inspired a feeling of hopelessness even in the strongest hearts. The great frosted eminence was capped by treacherous snowwreaths and overhung by dense bodies of blue translucent ice; its almost vertical face was sheathed in gleaming crystals, and from every crevice huge glittering ice cones dripped. A grand sight, truly, for those who could admire the glorious magnificence of nature, yet wonderfully disheartening to the wanderers, who saw in the ice-clothed mountain but an effectual barrier to their progress.

After a first cautious glance at the frowning

obstacle Mac gave a non-committal grunt, and disappeared along the circular base of the mount, with eyes upturned as if in search of some favorable sign. "Wait for me there, Archie," he called back over his shoulder.

Then Stewart aroused himself from his lethargy. "I'll gang an' keep an eye on Mac," said he, "for he's a bit too venturesome at times, an' no' to be trusted by himsel'."

So Archie was left to his own thoughts, and they were not of the pleasantest nature. The snow was slowly falling in soft, feathery flakes that floated erratically down from the glacier-enshrouding mists overhead, and the lonely figure at the base of the summit was gradually being garbed in a mantle of white; yet he remained motionless, gazing despairingly at the bleak frost-studded wall before him. "What a miserable end to my dreams!" he muttered sadly. "After all our efforts to reach the land of gold, here we are, stuck fast, the way hopelessly barred!"

He recollected himself suddenly; the faint moan of a rising storm reached his ears; the mountain top was densely curtained in flying mists, and at intervals fleecy clouds of vapory snow were being hurled into the valley. "A blizzard is getting up," said he; "I wonder where Mac and Stewart have got to. I can't see a trace of them anywhere about. Mac!" he shouted. "Mac! Where are you?"

His voice was drowned in the rushing sough of the gathering gale, and the falling snow obscured his vision. Blindly he staggered over the deepening drifts till his face was close to the glassy rock

surface, then, shading his eyes with his hands, he gazed upwards.

At that moment a stentorian shout pierced the blast, and, with a rush and a plunge, a dark form slid past his face and dived deep into the powdery expanse at his feet.

"Mac!" cried the astonished beholder, "is that you?"

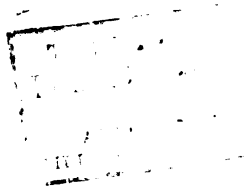
"Ay, it's just me," came a voice from the snow, and the individual in question floundered from out the chilly wreaths.

"Why, what have you been doing?" asked the bewildered youth; then he added: "Oh, Mac, I hope you are not hurt!"

Again there came a hoarse shout from aloft and behold! Stewart's lank figure came scudding down from the heights, barely missing the first arrival, who had succeeded in extricating himself from his frosty bath just in time to make room for his comrade. "I couldna haud on any longer," issued a muffled voice fom the depths, "my hands were gettin' sair frosted clutchin' on to a wee iceberg; so I thought it best to come awa' doon cannily."

Archie became more and more bewildered. Then Mac, who had been ruefully examining his nether garments, which had suffered somewhat seriously in the course of his abrupt descent, and having duly noticed with a sigh the extent of damage done, condescended to explain. "Stewart and I were up there," he said calmly, pointing aloft towards the blue mass overlapping the summit, which could now be seen but dimly through the flying spindrift. "Yes, Archie, the old Chilcoot will have to stiffen

"WITH A RUSH AND A PLUNGE A DARK FORM SLID PAST HIS FACE."



its back a bit more before it can stop this playful party, an' we'll get to the land o' Goshen after all."

Archie smiled a trifle incredulously. "Now, Mac," he reasoned, "how in the name of all that's wonderful can you come to that conclusion? Allowing that we did succeed in climbing like flies up that wall, there would still be our outfits to consider; one thousand pounds of flour and beans and such stuff won't fly over by itself, you know!"

Archie by this time had come to the decision that it would be well to apply a slight brake occasionally on his comrades' optimistic efforts.

"He's got us there, Mac," groaned Stewart. "An' oh! why did I leave my hame?"

But Mac was in nowise cast down. "Your father wouldn't have considered that a difficulty at all, Archie lad," he murmured in a tone of mild rebuke.

With a blush of shame the youth straightened himself up, and looked once more at the sullen heights overhead; then he turned and examined the cup-shaped valley in which they stood. Backwards again to the misty summit his eyes roved, and in that brief space it seemed as if the boy had indeed become a man.

"Yes, it can be done," he cried with sudden enthusiasm, "and ——"

"We are the vera individuals to do it," concluded Mac blandly. "You, Archie, are an engineer by instinct and training, all you lack is initiative, and considering your tender years that is maybe a virtue rather than a fault. On the other hand I'm a man o' constructin' parts ——"

"What sort o' lecture is this you're unravelin'

from your mind, Mac?" broke in Stewart aggrievedly.

"It means, you frozen monument o' ignorance an' iniquity, that Archie an' I have decided on a grand new scheme, embodying the principles contained in the poetry-book, to the effect that mind conquers matter. In other words, oh, you sinfu' Pharisee, it means that we're goin' to fly over that — that hillock, like — like ——"

"You've sp'ilt it, Mac, you've sp'ilt it," chortled the ignorant one. "Noo I'll finish the bonnie metaphor. You're goin' to flee over the Chilcoot like — like an elephant chasin' a snowba'."

"No, it means," explained Archie soberly, "that we intend to run a rope railway over the pass. I think that will be the easiest method." Then turning to Mac he added, "A simple pulley system should be sufficient."

The elder man smiled. "You've struck the idea, Archie. The pass is already bridged. Now let us get away back to make all necessary arrangements."

The three turned, and, arm in arm, set off on their journey to Sheep Camp. The snow was now falling in thick, blinding sheets, and the sound of the wind whistling fiercely above came to their ears as a soft sighing moan of ever-varying cadence, while now and again great fragments of glacier ice were dashed down into the narrow valley.

It was late in the afternoon when they reached the Mascotte Saloon, and darkness had closed over the pass. When they pushed open the doorway of the establishment, and staggered inside, the snow swept with a seething rush behind them, and deluged

the circle around the stove in chilly showers. The blizzard by this time had increased greatly in intensity, and was shrieking down the cañon with wonderful force.

" Glad to see you back, boys," said Bill Packard, rising and proffering his seat to Archie; " we're goin' to have a bit o' a storm, and I reckon it's not too safe outside."

" Did the Britishers see the pass? " shouted Chilcoot Charlie, with a sarcastic laugh, from a corner of the room, where he was engaged in a game of cards with his evil-visaged associate of the night before.

" Ay, the Britishers saw the pass," mimicked Mac in dangerously cool tones, " and it's more than you've seen, you human parasite."

" Mac, Mac," wailed Stewart, anticipating more trouble, and groping at the inside of his boot for his terrifying weapon, " can ye no' check that unruly temper o' yours? The innocent wee man didna mean to be unceevil. I'm sure he'll admit his maist grievous mistak'— " He turned with what he intended to be a mild and beseeching glance towards Chilcoot Charlie, but succeeded only in conveying an impression directly in opposition to the admitted peaceful nature of his overtures. Chilcoot Charlie snarled, and hastily resumed the seat he had just vacated.

" Wait till Soapy Sam gets up here," he muttered between his teeth. " I reckon he'll soon plant a few of the tenderfeet in this camp."

Archie gave a start of surprise on hearing the name. " Soapy Sam? " he echoed aloud.

"Yes, Soapy Sam," repeated the other, smiling darkly. "When he went away down south from Juneau he calc'lated he would be back in a hurry if a rush broke out, an'—oh, yes, you may well shiver, young fellow, for you'll lose your mighty pals pretty sudden. I'm no slouch wi' a shootin' iron, but I bar the bowie knife every time, an' that's where Soapy will get in his work—" He turned half-round and stared evilly at Stewart. "Yes, I reckon Soapy is the finest hand wi' a carver 'tween this and Florida, and don't you furget it."

Stewart bowed with ungraceful unction, but Mac, whose bronzed face had grown almost pale with suppressed anger, would have hurled himself upon the taunter there and then had not Archie restrained him.

"It's not worth while quarrelling with such a man," said he gently, "and as for Soapy Sam I'm sorry it's not likely we'll ever see him again in spite of this creature's bluster."

"Don't you worry about that rat's threats, boy," spoke up Captain Cardwell; "I think we're beginning to know each other better in this camp now, and I don't imagine we'll let any low-down gang run the show. But what did you think of the mean old pass? Didn't it give you a bit of a shock?"

"Oh, no! and I believe we can get across all right," answered Archie calmly. "The fact is," he continued, "we have decided to throw some sort of temporary bridge across it, and when we get our outfit up from Dyea we'll be able to move ahead right away."

In a moment nearly all the inmates of the saloon

had clustered near to hear of the scheme projected, and, obeying a nod from Mac, the young man proceeded to expound his plans. " After the guide rope is laid, the rest will be easy," he concluded amid a profound silence.

" But how are you to get up with the rope in the first place? " enquired an eager lisener.

Then Mac broke in. " You leave that to me; I'll lay the guide rope."

" That's just where ye mak' a serious error," commented Stewart. " The lichtest man is the man for that job, and I'm the vera sinner Providence has provided in the hour o' need."

Archie smiled strangely; after all, he himself was most fitted for the dangerous task, being the slightest and lithest in the room; but he made no remark, nor did Mac venture upon any further speech with reference to the matter. Then followed a scene of wild enthusiasm. " Tell us what to do and we're with you every time," was the general cry, and Bill, getting up on his seat, harangued the crowd at considerable length.

" The man who won't lend a hand is a mean 'ornery skunk," he bellowed, and there were few among them who were not eager in their offers of assistance, the few comprising Chilcoot Charlie and his diminished followers, who sat moodily apart, no doubt speculating on the loss that would be theirs should Sheep Camp so soon be broken up.

" Say what you want us to do," cried the orator at length, turning to Archie and Mac, " an' by the howlin' terrors, we'll obey ye like peaceable lambs."

But it was easy coming to such a decision within

the warm precincts of the saloon, and Archie vaguely wondered how many of Sheep Camp's citizens would finally venture beyond the pass even when the means were provided towards that end.

All through that night the blizzard shrieked and moaned, and the rain of glacier chips on the roof sounded as the blows of a thousand hammers. The Mascotte trembled in all its stout timbers, and swayed on its perilous icebound foundation whe some extra large glacier fragment struck its exposed walls with a dull crash, and ricochetted into the deep cañon mouth beyond. And through it all the camp slumbered, oblivious of the terrible danger that ever threatened. Far up the mountain side the huge overshadowing icefield rocked as if on a pivot, and thundered down its deadly hail. It was but a question of time till the giant mass would become dislodged. Then Heaven help Sheep Camp!

Stretched upon the floor, around the glowing stove, and in every draught-screened corner, the sleepers lay huddled in their blankets; and ever and anon a fleecy cloud would seek in beneath the doorway and cover them with powdery foam, while through the chinks in the weather logs, gusty white showers came rushing. The stove roared and crackled, fed lavishly at intervals by half-awakened slumberers, who performed the duty as if by instinct and then again sought dreamland. And the intense heat dissolved the frosted vapor persistently seeking inwards; the hot iron hissed and spluttered at the chilly contact, filling the room with a murky steam, while rivulets soon formed and trickled across the floorway.

Toward the early hours of the morning Bill Packard awoke and started to his feet uneasily. "I was at the building of this shebang," he muttered, as he listened intently to the various notes of the storm, "an' I know it's got a good grip o' the mountain, but that hanged glacier is too mighty close fur this to be a healthy quarter." With this discomforting reflection he piled several logs into the stove's fiery orifice and resumed his hard, and now somewhat damp, couch.

As daylight approached, the fierce blast subsided; the piercing shriek of the wind changed to a soft, lingering moan, and again to a dull, fitful echo. When dawn broke upon the camp, the air was clear and still, and the great glacier overhead glittered in the pale light of a cloudless sky. The first blizzard of the season had been safely weathered.

The next several days were occupied by the resourceful three in transporting their unwieldy outfit from Dyea to Sheep Camp. Stewart, having the greatest experience of northerly latitudes, had been given a free hand when selecting the various foodstuffs necessary for the journey, and right wisely had he chosen; yet provision for three men for six months resolved itself into a somewhat weighty outfit, notwithstanding that luxuries, excepting tobacco, — which Archie did not smoke, — had been strictly tabooed, and six months was the shortest time that could be safely calculated upon when arranging a perilous trip through a frostbound land. Then, apart from the actual edible stores required, a complete mining outfit had to be carried, with axes and ropes and buckets, and sundry cases of gelignite for blast-

ing purposes. Indeed the half-ton of goods, which went to form the little party's entire possession, included such a variety of articles that Archie could not remember even a fraction of the list without consulting his notebook, on which, however, he had made a careful record of all supplies at the time of purchase. Rifles, boots, moccasins, and snowshoes added much to the cumbrousness of the pile which had to be carried so laboriously in repeated journeys up the dangerous trail on which even a man unburdened found difficult enough passage. Yet here again Archie was given a further insight into the undismayed and dogged nature of his companions. With cheery good humor they vied with each other in their weight-carrying capabilities. At first it was considered amply sufficient for each individual to burden himself with the weight of a hundred and fifty pounds, which usually took the form of three fifty-pound sacks, strapped to their shoulders by a simple arrangement of belts; but after one or two journeys had been made, the youth was astounded to see Mac walk off with an extra couple of sacks tied on top of his usual number.

"However can he do it?" he said to Stewart in awe.

The gaunt one looked woefully after his departing comrade before making answer; then he said enigmatically: "I'm thinkin', Archie, that Mac would be a gey tough sort o' customer to wrastle wi', an' no' a'thegither deservin' o' my tender care. Hitch on twa mair o' the baggies. E'en as a miserable beast o' burden I canna bear bein' beaten by ony man." And he wandered off with a similar load,

whistling a joyful air in unmelodic key. Then Archie, strong lad though he was, struggled to his feet with the single sack his watchful friends had permitted him to carry, and hurried ahead to lead the trail into the cañon.

But at last the laborious task was completed, and on the fourth morning after the blizzard the comrades stood outside the Mascotte saloon, prepared for their ambitious task of conquering the mighty Chilcoot. Archie, strangely enough, had taken upon himself the entire responsibility of the great work, indeed he was forced to action in the matter, for Mac resolutely refused to assume command, and pleaded a lamentable ignorance of engineering facts in excuse, a proceeding which did not deceive Archie one jot.

" My experience in the past, Archie, lad," said he at length, " will serve well enough for me to assist you. Don't you see that I want you to get the experience now? You are able for it, laddie; let me see how well you can carry it through."

So on this morning Archie sought out Bill Packard and told him his plans. " I would like you and Captain Cardwell to come with us," he said. " We don't need the rest of the camp, unless some of them would care to help us to carry a few necessary wheels and things up to the base of the summit."

" Whatever you say shall be done," responded the debonair American, well pleased that he should be considered of service. " The boys will be proud to help in subduin' the ole skunk o' a mountain."

And soon a long line of bemuffled figures wended their way upwards through the narrow valley; some carried ropes, and some picks and snow shovels,

while others bore wheels and mining drills on their shoulders. A huge log windlass also was towed over the snow by six of the strongest miners, and thus equipped the strange procession struggled over the blastblown fields of ice, and gingerly trod the perilous drifts that intervened on the lonely mountain trail.

The grim, frosted barrier was reached at last, and then how puny seemed the power of man to combat repellent Nature! Before the towering mountain the shivering army of presumptuous humanity felt dwarfed into Lilliputian insignificance.

"It is a tough proposition, boys," said the Captain, as he gazed with some misgivings on the bleak, white wall; "but all the same I think you'll succeed."

A smile crossed Archie's features. The engineer in him had asserted itself at last. "As an engineering feat the bridging of the pass is simple enough," said he. "Once we get the guide rope over the glacier, and securely fixed, the rest will not be difficult."

"It beats me to know how the first rope is to go over," grunted Bill. "If we had a balloon or a rocket apparatus — " He stopped, and looked again into the glistening heights; then he continued despondently: "I'm afraid it's no use, boys. We can't hurt the confounded mountain worse'n a mosquito."

The numerous volunteers from the camp, having fixed the windlass in position, now departed back to their refuge, leaving Mac engaged trueing up the barrel to his satisfaction. Only Bill and the Captain remained of all those that had come. Mac

now approached the group. "Bill, my man," he said to the last speaker, "you're a vera useful man in a scrimmage, I've no doubt, but you're woefully ignorant in scientific matters." Then he turned to Archie: "Tell me where you want the rope fixed, my laddie." And he buttoned his coat tightly around his great chest with an air of determination.

But the young engineer shook his head. "If that's why you wanted to get out of the job of directing affairs, it won't work," he said quietly. "Everything depends on the guide rope going over, and I am the most fitted for the task. I am going to do it." Then his voice changed almost to a tone of command:

"Stand by the windlass, Mac, and see that it runs easy. Be ready to pay out the rope, and give it plenty of slack. Stewart, you be prepared to hitch on the heavy manilla when you see me go over the top."

Without waiting to hear any remonstrance he quickly fastened the light cord around his waist, and started upwards over the shelving snowdrifts that clung about the summit's lower altitudes. But he had not gone far before Mac was at his side, his face quivering under a strong emotion.

"Give me the rope, laddie," he entreated brokenly; "you must give me the rope. How could I go home an' tell your mother if anything happened? You don't realize what it would mean to her."

The lad paused for an instant, then pressed his anxious comrade gently back. "I'm going to justify my right to be considered of service," he said firmly; "you are needed at the windlass, Mac."

He started afresh on his perilous climb, and the big Scot, winking his eyes vigorously, as if to clear his vision, plunged back through the crisp snow, and stood by the windlass, controlling the now slowly-issuing cord, and the watchers noted that his grisled cheek had grown gray and ashen-hued. Stewart also stood near at hand, his head bowed down on his breast in an attitude of deepest dejection.

The windlass slowly revolved, with many a creak and groan, and the trailing cord dragged upwards with scarcely perceptible motion. The ascent was almost perpendicular, and how the climber kept a foothold mystified the onlookers. Up, up, the figure clambered; his feet dug deep in the frosted wall, and his arms clutched at the brittle snow, and amid sparkling flaky showers he writhed his way far up the mountain steeps. Behind him, dislodged ice fragments and miniature avalanches streamed into the valley, and directly overhead the ominous body of blue-green ice capping the summit gleamed dully through the mists. Foot by foot the rope paid out, and higher and higher the daring climber rose until he appeared as a mere speck on a sea of foam.

" By the Great Republic, he'll do it! " spoke Bill at length, with a gasp of relief.

" Yes, he'll do it," said his companion, lowering his gaze for the first time since the ascent began, " and he deserves success if ever a man did."

But the face of the man at the windlass was fixed and stern, and he never once ventured to look upwards, as if fearing to witness a tragedy. At last

Archie disappeared over the domelike top of the crowning ice ridge, and soon after the following cord twitched and jerked, then sped onwards rapidly, while the great rope-encircled drum revolved merrily. Then only did Mac's face relax, and he gazed aloft almost joyously.

" He's all right now," he shouted wildly, and Stewart hastened to attach the many-stranded manilla to the rushing guide line.

" He must have gone down to Crater Lake," said Bill, noting the meagre length of rope retained on the windlass. Suddenly the strain was relaxed, and the whirling drum ceased its gyrations; only for a moment, however, then the heavier rope was slowly hoisted upwards. Over a thousand feet of the stout guide rope were issued before it came to a halt, and then the shivering men at the base of the mountain gave vent to their feelings in loud whoops of delight, which echoed and re-echoed sharply through the ice-bound valley.

" I say, Mac," Bill broke in, after the windlass had been still for a few minutes, " don't you think we'd better swarm up that line with a few agricultural weapons? "

The rope was firm and taut, but it was doubtful whether Archie had yet succeeded in making even a temporary fastening.

" Better give him five minutes more," was the Captain's advice, and he seized upon a pick and shovel and strapped them over his shoulder. Stewart loaded himself with a sledge hammer and drill, and Mac gripped a fresh coil of rope — in case of accidents, he explained.

Bill dubiously filled his pockets with gelignite cartridges and several lengths of fuse.

When they were thus variously accoutred, a dim form appeared on the misty heights and signalled "All clear!"

CHAPTER V

THE WIPE OUT AT SHEEP CAMP

LOUD were the rejoicings in Sheep Camp that night when it became known that communication had been established with the " other side " of the pass, and hasty preparations were made by many of the eager miners to have their outfits removed to the base of the summit without delay, for, now that the blizzard season had started, no one could tell when another storm might rage over the pass and cause further vexatious delay to their progress.

" All you've got to do, boys," explained Kentucky Bill, after much boisterous acclamation had been expended on the original three who had " come and seen and conquered," " is to hitch on your loaded sleigh, apply your energy at the windlass, an' up she goes. It's as easy as fallin' off a log. Thar's nary difficulty about the consarn, an' wance over it's all plain sailing — I mean sleighing, for the ornery lakes are frozen up, an' ye'll have to scoot down on the ice to Klondike."

Bill did not know anything of the difficulties and dangers attached to the carrying out of his last statement; but neither did the bulk of his hearers, who all became wildly delighted and talked jubilantly of their prospects of getting through to the frozen Eldorado before the summer.

Archie received the congratulations of the camp with diffidence, and it was evident that he did not consider the railway, so called, anything more than a temporary structure, which, indeed, was all that it had been intended to be. Mac alone seemed to understand the misgivings that filled his mind, and when the others were holding high revel these two sat apart and talked long and earnestly together.

"But I can see no way to save it," Archie declared at last. "If a snow slide occurs, or even if a fair-sized piece of the glacier comes down, the whole contrivance will be swept away as if it were no more than a spider's web."

In that sentence was summed up his doubts and fears, for, having seen the top of the pass, he had noted what neither Mac nor he had considered before, the vast volumes of snow that rested close to the edge of the coast declivity and directly above the line of railway. If by any chance this became dislodged, it would entirely obliterate the structure. "Let us hope," said Mac fervently, "that we'll have a few days' grace before the next hurricane comes along. By that time we'll maybe have all our goods safely landed on the far side o' the terrible mountain. We daren't play with Providence, Archie."

And thus, while during the following days the denizens of Sheep Camp continued to make their arrangements for moving onward, Archie and his two comrades pursued a policy of immediate and strenuous action. From Dyea to Sheep Camp the damp coastal breezes had at this time not permitted the snow to lie thickly enough for sleighing purposes, but onwards towards the higher altitudes of the pass

the snow lay in places from fifty to a hundred feet deep, so that a new method of transport would have to be arranged, and one which would be eminently more efficient than the human pack-horse system which had been the only feasible mode of progression so far. But the trail to the base of the summit was steep, and broken by numerous chasms and gullies, and it required the united efforts of the three to drag even one sleighload thither; so the journey, though only four miles, occupied the whole day, while four such trips were necessary before their work would be completed.

Then it was made evident how dubious was the task upon which they had embarked. Each day the great dark clouds gathered loweringly over the heads of the striving men, and the snow came down in steady showers, but the air remained still and motionless; an ominous calm brooded over the pass. Bill and the Captain were the only two who set about copying the example of the bridge builders, and even they, resourceful men though they were, had allowed one precious day to slip before Mac's earnestly reiterated warning aroused their growing lethargical energy.

"We would like to go down the Yukon in your company, boys," said the Captain apologetically; "but neither Bill nor I cared to intrude our little caravan, or we would have made a start earlier."

"The country is surely big enough for us all," responded Archie smiling.

But it was Stewart who sternly pointed out to the two how ambitious were their desires. "Me an' Mac an' Archie," he declaimed, "are a vera select

an' circumspeck party. Forbye, we are men o' peace, an' even the sound o' wordy strife hurts our maist tender feelin's, an'— an'— what are ye laughin' at, ye — ye flounder-faced mummy? I alloo nae man to laugh at me — " This most ferociously, and the culprit, who was none other than Bill, hastened to assuage the self-confessed peaceable man's wrath.

" I war' only thinkin'," said he, " that as you an' me are both soft-hearted sort o' galoots, our soothing influence would be a mighty handy thing if Mac an' the Cap'n couldn't agree. But ye were jest a shade oncivil, ye thorny-looking salamander, an' I guess I'll hitch off your scalp as a warning."

The fiery Stewart dropped his sleigh rope at once, the lust of battle in his eye; but catching sight of a twinkle of amusement in the Kentuckian warrior's optic he slowly resumed his duty. " You should try an' check them susancidal tactics o' yours, Bill," said he; " but I'll forgie ye this time, though I'm nervish aboot your safety should you journey far in our guid company."

Archie had long since ceased to trouble about the idiosyncrasies of the wily Stewart, and during the course of this wordy dispute he made no comment, nor was he surprised a little later to notice the two erstwhile disputants engaged in earnest and amicable conversation. But hard as the strong men struggled to accomplish their work it was evident that theirs was a race against the elements for the right of free passage over the Chilcoot. Denser and denser grew the storm clouds, and sullen fell the snow.

" I think we should try and take all that is left

up with us to-day," said Archie, as they were loading up on the fifth morning.

" Ay, we must make a shift to run the whole outfit across the pass this time," agreed Mac.

" I'm afraid you're going to leave us, then, boys," spoke the Captain, " for even if Bill and I burst ourselves we can't haul the remainder of our lot up to the pass on this trip."

" No, boys, I don't reckon it's any use us tryin' to get over the summit wi' you to-night," agreed Bill sorrowfully.

" Pile anything that's left over on tap o' my sleigh," suggested Stewart calmly, " I believe I could wrastle wi' some extra baggage at a pinch."

Finally they succeeded in arranging matters so that nothing was left behind but the rifles of the expedition, which absolutely refused to pack securely on top of the already overburdened snow ships.

" Never mind them," said Mac. " They're not vera heavy, and Archie and me can make another journey for them to-night after seeing everything safe on the other side of the Chilcoot."

And into the murky gloom they struggled, straining at their load, pursued by the faint cheers of the assembled miners whose courage at the last had been found wanting.

It was late in the afternoon when they reached the base of the summit, and the five weary men sat down on the snow for a brief and well-earned rest. The twin ropes communicating with the beclouded heights were just barely discernible through the deepening shadows, and the windlass was almost buried in new-fallen snow.

" Howlin' blazes! That war' a stiff pull," ejaculated Bill, " an' I reckon we've got here none too soon nuther. Why! the bally old machinery is nearly drowned."

" I don't think we can afford to waste much time," commented Archie anxiously, rising to his feet, as a faint sound from aloft reached his ears. The disturbing note was heard by all, and affected them greatly. Slight indeed was the alarm, suggestive only of the gentle murmur of far-distant water, but everyone there knew and realized what it meant.

" The blizzard has broken, boys," said the Captain quietly, " and like enough it will be a hustler when it bursts up."

" Come on then, lads," cried Mac. " Lend a hand to clear the windlass and we'll cheat the old Chilcoot yet."

Right willingly they responded to the call, and soon the endless rope worked freely, showing that all was clear on top, and with scarcely a pause a well-freighted sleigh was attached to the line in readiness for its upward flight. Then a hurried consultation was held. It was known that on the other side of the pass after a short and easy descent the shores of Crater Lake would be reached, the first of the great chain of lakes forming the source of the mighty Yukon River, and near its edge it was decided to make the first camp.

" It will be a mighty cold corner, I reckon, but there ain't no help for it," said Bill. " Now, the question is, who is going aloft to unload the wagons, an' who is goin' to stay an' work the engines? "

" I think I'd better go up," announced Archie;

and up he went, hand over hand, on one of the ropes, his feet getting occasional support by digging deep into the frosted face of the mountain.

"He's a bonnie climber," murmured Stewart admiringly. "I mind when I used to swarm up the weather shrouds o' the *Active* —— "

But his reminiscences were rudely cut short, for just then the windlass barrel gave a twitch and spun half a circle round, and a gasp of horror broke from the onlookers' lips as they saw the boy jerk backwards with the moving rope. The tough raw-hide band brake on the barrel had proved faulty owing to a thin film of ice having formed on the polished wood, and quickly melted under the frictional heat of the straining leather. Stewart, however, was near, so near, in fact, that the windlass arm in the course of its first revolution was stayed on his stout shoulder, and for the moment the shock interrupted the thread of his musings. Mac abused himself roundly for failing to examine the brake action before permitting Archie to trust his safety to the rope.

"He might have been killed but for you, Stewart," he said, noting with joy that the climber's nerve had not failed him in the emergency, and that he still continued his energetic upward movement.

"As I was saying," continued Stewart ruminatingly, "when I harpooned wi' my ain hand the whale that swallowed Jonah, an'—— "

Even Archie, now nearing the top of the pass, heard the burst of laughter that assailed the narrator at this point, and he wondered how it were possible that anyone could laugh so heartily amid such uncanny surroundings. Over the blue mass of ice

forming the cap of the notorious dividing ridge he crawled gingerly, on hands and knees, still keeping the guide line fast under his arm, then suddenly he stood upright, and waved his hand to those below, whom he could but faintly see through the intervening clouds. He had reached the greatest altitude of the pass, and his feet rested on a swirling snowdrift, some four thousand feet above sea level. On his first dangerous climb to this position he had been able to see far down into the winding Yukon valley from his coign of vantage, but now a dense impenetrable mist obscured all vision beyond a few yards.

For some seconds he remained looking around helplessly, a strange eerie feeling of insecurity oppressing him. A violent humming, as of a huge top, assailed his ears with almost deafening clamor. The sound seemed to surround him, yet no rushing wind blast smote his cheek, and yet he was conscious of a mighty storm raging near. The snow flew upwards at his feet, and struck forcefully into his face, and an icy feeling penetrated his limbs. Then at last he solved the odd phenomenon. A fierce whirlwind was gyrating far overhead, and by the force of its suction had converted the snowy summit into a veritable circling sea of foam. Archie shivered. "So this is the gateway to the land of gold," he muttered. "It seems more like the entrance to a land of death."

He forced himself onward, clutching the rope for guidance, and suddenly he felt it move in his hand. "The first load is coming up," he said. "I ought to have examined that wheel before this." A few seconds more, and he reached the great log embedded vertically in the snow, on the top of which a

wide flanged wheel was slowly revolving. He inspected it hastily. " It runs true with the load," he observed aloud, " and now I can only hope the rope doesn't chafe too much on the glacier. Steel wire ropes would be required for this job; but I think the manilla will see us through. Hullo! I thought I heard a dog bark. No, it must have been my own nervousness; there could be no dog about here."

The weighted sleigh was now heard, crunching over the smooth ice of the glacier. Onwards it came. Archie could see it now, and his heart gave a bound of delight. Everything was working smoothly; not a hitch had occurred. He loosened the sleigh from the moving line and undid the strappings; then he hastily unloaded it. And still the wheel revolved, and the rope ran on. A bead of perspiration broke out on Archie's brow. He had neglected to arrange a means whereby the men at the windlass would become aware of the sleigh's safe arrival. " It's a good thing I got it unhitched before it bumped against the post," he said thankfully; " something might have broken. I'll just let the empty concern slide down on the other rope." And, having made secure his connections, he watched the lightened conveyance glide slowly backwards into the gloom.

Again and again this operation was repeated; apparently those below had ample faith in the lad's sagacity, for their movements were like clockwork in their regularity. Several times during this period Archie fancied he heard the deep-mouthed bark of a dog mingle with the sound of the whirling tempest, and despite his efforts to dispel the illusion he gradually became convinced that his ears had not

been playing him false. While he was marvelling over the fact that any animal had climbed those steep heights, which had baffled some of the strongest men, a great black mastiff suddenly emerged from the white darkness, and, whining piteously, thrust its icy cold nose against the young man's hand. Considerably startled, Archie bent down and gently patted the poor brute, which appeared to be starving from hunger as well as from cold; but the animal drew away from his caressing touch, and with a series of short, sharp barks plunged back into the mists whence it came. Another load at this moment arrived by the strange railway, and engrossed the young engineer's attention for a few minutes; but when he looked up, after undoing the binding ropes, he was surprised to find the dog again at his side, whining dolefully as before.

"Why, doggie," said Archie, "what is the matter? Just you wait a little and I will look after you."

But the animal apparently was not to be comforted; it whined and barked in turn, and, finally, seizing the youth's coat in its powerful teeth, dragged him several yards over the snow before he could free himself.

"You are just a bit too energetic, my four-footed friend," said the lad again. "Why can't you have patience?" He stopped and looked searchingly into the mists. Out from the vortex of the storm he had surely heard a voice, weak yet shrill. For a moment he stood irresolute. No, there could be no mistake; there it was again, a feeble, wavering human voice calling from the region of whirling snow: "Dave! Dave!" And

the dog heard it, and with an answering growl bounded off; but Archie was at its heels. Neglected lay the sleigh with its load, and the travelling rope for once descended unencumbered. The youth had forsaken his charge to respond to a higher call, the call of suffering humanity.

The dog did not lead him far; scarce a score of yards away he came to a halt, and there half-buried in a seething drift a murmuring figure lay. With a cry of sympathy Archie knelt down beside the shivering object, and found himself looking into the fresh-hued face of a young Indian, who smiled back at him wanly and endeavored to raise his hand in greeting. At a glance Archie understood the position of affairs. The poor unfortunate had tripped and strained himself, and now lay helpless; a broken snowshoe still clinging to one of his moccasined feet was ample indication of this fact. Gently he raised the sufferer's head on his knee, and strove to think of what should be done, and the dog stood near, watching him with an expression of almost human thankfulness on his large brown eyes. Then suddenly the Indian began to talk, not in his own language, but in purest English, and his voice sounded almost girlishly clear.

"The snows of the mighty mountain have conquered Silver Water at last. No more shall he chase the caribou and moose deer; no more shall he fight the savage silver bear. Past are the glories of Silver Water, but the happy hunting grounds of his fathers shall soon receive him."

He ceased his weird speech, then, gazing fixedly

at Archie, he continued in more rational tones: "Deliver the message of Silver Water, O Friend of the Indian. Tell the white man to come not into the land of the Thron-Diucks. This is the voice of his pale-faced brethren: 'Gold there is in Thron-Diuck, but food is more precious than gold. Stay your coming till the springtime'. . . ."

A dark shadow loomed out of the mists. It was Mac, who had come to investigate the reason of the railway's failure. Breathing heavily, he approached with an anxious question on his lips, which died away as he took in the desolate scene before him. "A strained sinew," he muttered shortly, "but if the cold hasn't gripped him we'll save him yet."

Here Silver Water began to speak again in confused raving sentences, but as the listeners pieced together the story he told, they marvelled deeply at the strong spirit of endurance shown by the young Indian on the perilous journey he described. It appeared that he had been selected by the few white men in the Klondike district to carry a message through to the coast, a message of warning to those who would venture north without a full equipment of stores, and an appeal to the Governments of Canada and America to restrain all but the strongest men from starting on a trail which meant probable death. In a small glazed packet, tied to his belt, he carried the meagre mails of the community, and this he handed over to Mac with a weary sigh.

"Silver Water has failed," he said. "Being weak after witnessing the rise of thirty suns on the

long white trail, he stumbled and fell, and the Frost King has subdued him."

The darkness of night was fast creeping in, and the note of the rising storm grew ever more fierce. Mac gathered the Indian in his arms and staggered off with his burden towards the now motionless rope. "Go down first, Archie," said he, "and tell the men at the windlass to jam the brake on hard. I'll carry this poor red laddie to Sheep Camp this night if I've to crawl all the way. Stewart can take your place up here, and Bill and the Captain can finish all the work that has to be done down below. There's not much left."

In a few minutes the lad was with the anxious three at the windlass, and shortly afterwards the communicating lines drew taut, the windlass creaked and strained under the brake strap, and Mac hove dimly into view bearing his heavy load.

No sooner had he safely landed with his helpless charge than Dave the dog came sliding down from the heights with the velocity of an express train, and disappeared in a gigantic snowwreath, whence he emerged almost immediately, shaking his shaggy head and barking joyously. A fire was promptly built by Stewart, one of the sleighs being ruthlessly broken up for the purpose of providing the necessary fuel, and speedily a cup of hot coffee was being forced between the benumbed Indian's lips; then Bill whistled in surprise.

"The poor beggar's been on short rations for some time I reckon," he said. "Look at his face, Mac. If that thar frontispiece does not spell starvation, wall, I never done a starve, that's all."

The Indian smiled. "Many men starve in the Thron-Diuck land when the Frost King comes," he said. "Silver Water has seen three suns on the trail without food."

"An' how long have ye been lyin' up there?" asked Stewart.

"Only since morning," came the reply.

"That means onything from seven to ten hours," groaned the interrogator, "and the thermometer below zero, and a blizzard playin' tunes in your long hair! My man, if you're a sample o' the Injuns o' this country, I'm goin' to hae nae quarrel wi' them."

"Well, boys," said Mac, "I mean to get this Indian to Sheep Camp, blizzard or no blizzard. We have to go down for the rifles and snowshoes anyway, and Archie and I can attend to that. Get everything across from this dangerous quarter, and we'll know where to find you when we come back."

"If I'm any judge," spoke the Captain earnestly, "I should say we're going to have a corker of a storm to-night. It's been working up for days. Don't you hear it now?"

The hum of the circling winds was hushed, but in its place sounded the long, low wail of the gathering blasts, and the snow smote fiercely down on the little band. "The only safe place is on the other side to-night," answered Mac shortly. "Keep a light burning in your camp, and expect us back about midnight. Now, give me a lift wi' the Indian lads an' don't neglect your duties while I'm away."

They lifted Silver Water gently on to Mac's broad shoulder and Archie strode ahead to mark

the uncertain trail. Then those who remained watched them disappear into the darkness.

And still the warning note of the rising storm kept increasing its clamor and the snow began to fall in blinding sheets. That night will be long remembered by all who were within twenty miles of the pass at the time. It was late in the evening before the blizzard broke in all its fury and swept resistlessly down the Dyea valley hurling giant masses of snow and ice into the cañon beyond Sheep Camp.

The Mascotte was filled to overflowing with new arrivals from Dyea, who had been attracted thither by the news of the railway's success, and they heard with dismay the ominous rain of glacier-ice beat against the walls of their shelter, and fear was expressed on every countenance. Again and again a dull echoing roar from the icefield overhead would reach their ears and cause them to shiver apprehensively.

" If this blizzard continues, the glacier will sweep us into the cañon," one man shouted.

But Chilcoot Charlie — who had never seen the Chilcoot — allayed the rising fear. " This here shanty will stay right whar' it is," he announced. " Let the blasted glacier come down if it wants to."

These brave words were hailed with acclamation, in the midst of which the door burst open, and, accompanied by a huge mastiff, two men entered, one bearing an unconscious burden of humanity on his back. From head to foot they were covered with snow, and their faces were bleeding from numerous wounds caused by the ice-laden blasts.

"By the Great Yukon River! it's the bridge builders," cried someone.

"Bear a hand, boys; there's a man hurt," exclaimed another, and at once an eager throng surrounded the newcomers and helped to relieve Mac of his limp burden.

Many were the questions they asked, but the stalwart Scot, strong man though he was, was too overcome to answer. To have carried a man down from the pass through the darkness on a night such as this was a feat which few would have cared to emulate, so they made way for him with rough respect, and he sat down on a seat near by and struggled to regain his breath.

Archie, too, was weary enough, but he refused to make any complaint. "Look after the Indian," he said; "we found him lying on the top of the pass. He is Silver Water, the Indian mail carrier from Dawson. Get him down to Dyea, and go yourselves before it is too late."

"Umph, only an Injun after all!" sneered Chilcoot Charlie. But he got no further; a tall, bearded man rejoicing in the honored title of Pioneer Dick, who had been tending to Silver Water's injuries, turned on him sternly.

"When you have done half as much for the country as this Indian has done we may listen to you," he said. "Silver Water, the Indian mail carrier, is known from Behring Strait to Vancouver, and from the Mackenzie River to the Pacific. The men of Cassiar know him, and the men of the Yukon have trusted him. For seven hundred miles he has come over an unknown trail, with only

a dog for company. Could you do such a journey?"

In the impressive silence that followed, the shrieking blast outside seemed to sound out with redoubled force, and the trembling and creaking of the logged walls was all the more discernible. Then Mac rose to his feet and addressed the multitude.

"Get clear o' Sheep Camp to-night, men. Take the Indian with you, and go far beyond the cañon before you halt, for I believe there'll be a wipe out at this camp before morning."

Chilcoot Charlie was the first to yell: "Let us git, boys," as he dived for the door, and a pandemonium existed for the space of five minutes, in which time Pioneer Dick and a few of his comrades got together a rough litter on which to bear the injured mail carrier. Then a long line of figures made their way out into the inky blackness, and on, on towards Dyea, leaving only Silver Water's bearers in the room with Mac and Archie.

"Goodbye, boys," said Pioneer Dick, "I know what you mean to do to-night, and I would gladly have come with you. But we may meet again. Good luck to you."

And Silver Water raised himself upon his elbow and held out his hand. "In the northern snows we shall meet again, O Strong Heart," he said to Mac, "and Silver Water shall remember. And you, my white brother," he continued, turning to Archie, "take from me an Indian's gift. The truest friend I ever had I give to you who hath need of him. Dave!" The great dog answered to his call.

"Goodbye, Dave," softly spoke the Indian, as if

he were addressing a human being, " your home is amid the wild, and to the wild you shall return. Go with the young paleface, Dave." He pressed the dog's head against Archie's hand. A minute later Mac and Archie were left alone, save for the dog, which lingered by the lad's side and looked at him with wondering eyes.

" Which is it to be for us, Mac — Dyea or the summit? " asked the youth, turning to his companion, who was abstractedly stroking his snow-bedewed mustache.

" I must go back, Archie, but you —— "

" Will go with you," said Archie decisively.

The stove in the centre of the room was rapidly losing its ruddy hue, and the swinging oil lamp flamed and flickered in the gusty draughts. Outside sounded the shrill note of the tempest, broken at intervals by the deep rumble of the disintegrating glacier. Archie shivered. " Heaven help anyone who may be within reach of that icefield when it starts to move," he said. Then, having gathered together their load of rifles, the two daring spirits passed out of the open doorway, and, turning their bowed heads to meet the rushing icy tempest, staggered on towards the fateful summit of the pass.

How they reached the shelter of the great mountain neither of them could ever tell. They stumbled, and clambered, and writhed their way upwards against overwhelming odds. The flying ice cut their clothing to tatters and cruelly gashed their already lacerated faces, and at times the seething snowclouds all but smothered them in their dense

white folds. As they neared the base of the summit the fury of the storm seemed to increase, and thunderous echoes rumbled out incessantly. Great fields of ice were being dashed into the valley.

" It'll be a matter o' luck, laddie," gasped Mac, as they halted a moment for breath, " if we get through this safely."

But Archie had long ago arrived at that conclusion. The air was thick with the swirling foam, and the darkness of Styx prevailed. Then suddenly the howling tempest seemed to rise high above them, and the snow no longer dashed into their faces, but descended in an even downpour; they had reached the shelter of the pass at last. Blindly they groped around for the windlass; it was still safe, and the long ropes communicating with the blizzard-swept heights responded to the touch.

" We must make sure work with the brake this time, Archie," breathed Mac, and he felt about for a stray piece of wood with which to wedge the barrel tight. While so engaged, a hoarse crackling from above burst ponderously upon their ears.

" The glacier! the glacier! " cried Archie.

" Up you go, my laddie! Up you go! I'm close behind you," anxiously entreated Mac. " It's the only chance, for we're trapped like rats if we wait here."

Up, up, they struggled, towards the inferno that held sway on the Chilcoot's grim heights, and though the wail of the storm grew more demoralizingly shrill as they advanced, it was not it that sent the chill to their hearts, it was the ever-increas-

ing crackle, crackle, crackle, from the overhanging glacier. Now their hands touched the unseen, gently-sliding mass. Now they were clambering over it, and yet it was moving backwards under them with deliberately increasing momentum.

"Hurry, Archie, hurry!" cried Mac's voice. "Leave the rope. It may break at any minute. Now jump, laddie. Jump!"

And Archie jumped, not knowing exactly why; and immediately afterwards he found himself floundering in the snow, vainly striving to move forward in the teeth of the raging tempest. A hand gripped his arm and hastened him still onward.

"The suction may get us yet, Archie. Struggle on a wee bit yet."

Mac had barely ceased speaking when, with a mighty rending and tearing that echoed high above the blizzard's fiercest note, the great glacier they had just traversed broke away, and crashed and rumbled and roared down the steep declivity; and the mountain trembled beneath the wanderers' feet.

For the space of a minute, Archie could not find words to speak, and it was his companion who broke the strain. "That's the end o' our railway, Archie," said he grimly.

"It has served our purpose," answered the youth breathlessly. Then he uttered an exclamation of regret: "But what has happened to the dog? I had forgotten all about him. I suppose he must have followed the Indian after all. Anyhow he could never have climbed up over that glacier."

"Couldn't he?" echoed Mac drily. "Something

kept forcing up behind me, an' that something was a dog."

And so it was, for just then Dave's shaggy body brushed against Archie's knee. The dog had indeed scaled the pass after his new master.

The bright light from a camp sheltering near the shores of Crater Lake was now distinctly visible, and slowly they walked towards it.

In the morning, when the fierce blizzard had spent itself, and the heavens again were calm and smiling, the five comrades went up to the pass to view the wonders that the mighty elements had wrought. Glacier and railway alike had disappeared, and the valley below was filled with the debris of the cataclysm. And far down the winding gorge, where the Mascotte Saloon of Sheep Camp had stood, a sea of jagged ice boulders lay strewn, and the misty peak overhead was bare.

In that one night, Nature, with herculean effort, had freed from their icy crowns the entire line of mountain heights from Chilcoot to distant Dyea. Sheep Camp was no more.

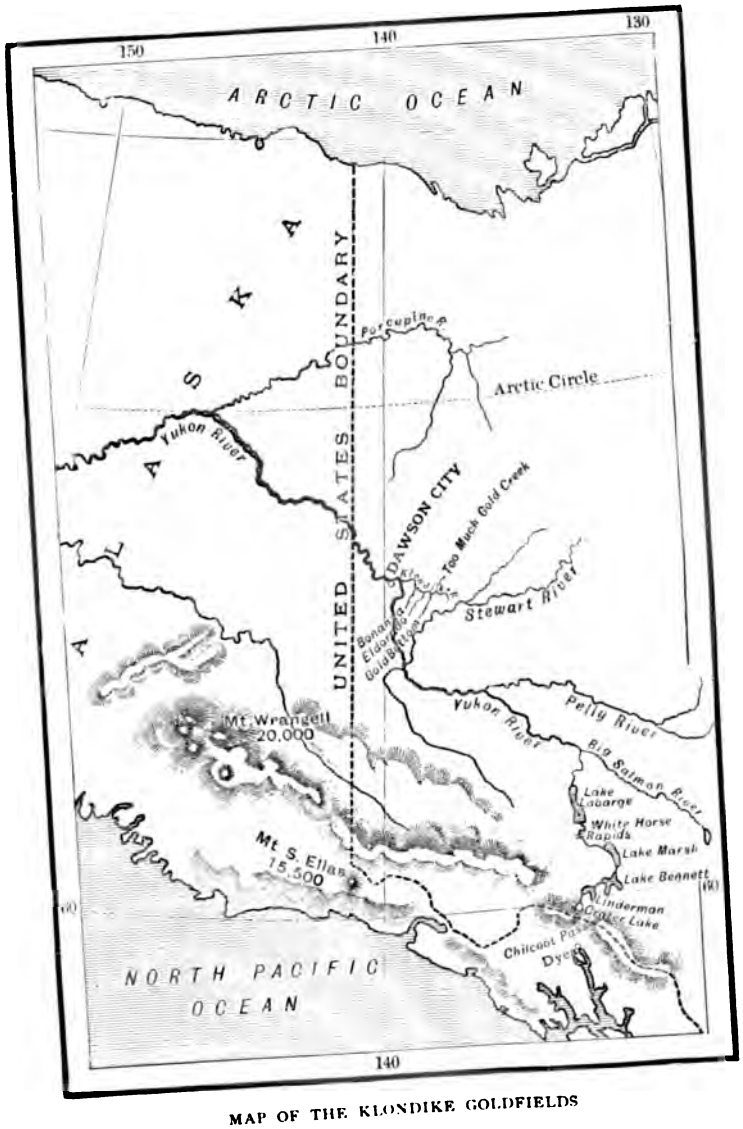
CHAPTER VI

LAKE LINDERMAN

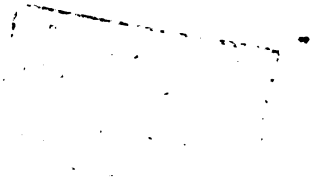
LAKE LINDERMAN was not frozen. Its waters glistened cold and cheerless in the dull light of a leaden sky as Archie and his co-adventurers approached, and the spirits of the little party ran high when they saw the welcome waterway open before them. The descent from Crater Lake to this point had been comparatively easy of accomplishment, for though it is no simple matter towing a sleigh up a precipitous incline, the difficulties of snow travel are very considerably minimized when the trail slopes in favor of the pullers. Consequently the downward course from the summit had not taken more than a day altogether, nor were any weary return journeys necessary, as had been the case on the coastal side of the Chilcoot.

A camp was quickly erected amid some tall pine trees a short distance from the water, and then came a brief but decisive argument among the four experienced travellers concerning their ideas for immediate action.

"I vote that we start building a boat right away," said the Captain. "A sort of dory, about twenty feet long, with a flat bottom, should just about fill the bill."



MAP OF THE KLONDIKE GOLDFIELDS



To this suggestion Mac gave his assent at once. "I'll not say," he added in conclusion, "that a flat-bottomed barge is in conformity with my ideas o' aquatic beauty, but considerin' the fact that it has to be built here, and out o' the vera rawest material, and not in a Clyde or Tyne shipbuilding yard, we may as well restrict extravagance in design, and aim at usefulness before beauty."

Whereupon Stewart raised a dissentient voice. "And for what reason should we build a boatie at a'?" he demanded as a preliminary.

"Wal'," grunted Bill, "they say it's seven hundred odd miles from here to the Klondike, an' I reckon the water is a leetle bit too cold for such a powerful swim."

"Your re-marks are triv-ial an' maist injudicious," retorted Stewart severely. "I was thinkin' that a bonnie wee raft would serve our purpose." Then he waxed enthusiastic: "Just think o' the poetic nature o' such a craft, sailin' awa' on its lang journey, wi' a pennant flutterin' at the mizzen, an' ——"

"Shut off the steam," interrupted Mac sternly. "Your poetic fancy is gettin' mixed, I'm thinkin'. Anyway, a raft would be too slow for us. We want to get to the end o' our journey in reasonable time."

"I'm rather tickled wi' the raft idea myself," quoth Bill; "if only 'cos the contrivance could be easier made."

Then Archie was called upon for his opinion, to ease the deadlock that had arisen. He at once favored Mac's views. "Suppose we get frozen

in," he said, " we could put skids under the boat and use it as a sledge."

" The boat it is, then," cried the Captain. " Now, boys, let us get out the axes and rip-saws, and make a start."

With cheerful unanimity they set to work at their initial task of felling timber, and before night had fallen the rough pine logs had been prepared and cut to length in readiness for rip-sawing into planks. In the short space of two days after their decision was made, the boat was completed and ready for launching. And all this time not the slightest hitch had occurred; in the most natural way possible Mac seemed to take charge of operations, and yet the work appeared to grow under their combined hands. All alike strove their utmost. The Captain and Bill did yeoman service, and Stewart performed prodigious feats to the accompaniment of much unmelodious song. The strength contained in his somewhat spare frame was little short of marvellous. In truth Mac and he were a mighty pair, and they worked together like Trojans. Archie had not yet fully fathomed the vagaries of their complex natures. To him Mac was still something of an enigma, combining the more serious traits of human character with the oddly bizarre qualities of a burlesque humorist, and which of the two temperamental opposites predominated in his nature was no easy matter to determine. As for Stewart, well, his good humor was so obvious behind all his warlike speeches that the youth found himself wondering what sort of man would be revealed when the mask was lifted. The Captain and Bill were

more transparent; honest and sincere they were, fit representatives of their respective countries.

Archie found himself musing in this fashion as he gazed at the handiwork of his companions. There was the boat all finished in so short a time, built from timber of the rudest kind, and only the most elemental of tools had been used in its construction. He was aroused from his reverie by hearing Stewart's voice at his side.

" It's no' ex-actly a Clyde clipper, Archie, but it'll mebbe sail better than it looks. But how did you manage to work oot a' the measurements so exact? It must be a grand thing to hae a head for figures."

" Why, Stewart," said the youth, " it's a simple matter providing the figures."

" And in that case it's a simple matter building the boat, my lad," interpolated Mac coming forward. " Now, Archie," he continued, " I'll give you a vera useful hint; when any special kind o' knowledge you possess is called into use, don't hesitate to make a speech about it beforehand, and then you'll achieve a big reputation. Now, how would you know that Stewart had discovered the North Pole if he hadn't been dinnin' the story into our ears for the last two or three weeks, an'——'

" Mak' nae mair reflections, my man," burst forth his reproachful compatriot, " or I'll be forced to refer to that maist mar-vellous yarn o' yours about Sooth Ameriky —— "

" In which case the truth o' my assertion will be rendered all the more obvious," retorted Mac hastily. Then the three walked back to the tent to partake

of the supper which Bill had volunteered to cook.

Early on the following morning Archie arose, and, arming himself with towel, sponge, and a piece of soap, set off for the lake side to perform his ablutions. The air was cold and still and the branches of the trees around were besprinkled with a dazzling white hoar. "By Jove! it does feel freezy," he ejaculated, making a short run down to the beach to restore the laggard circulation in his limbs; but when he arrived there he gave a whistle of dismay. Along the shore and for some distance out into the lake a broad sheet of ice extended. "This will be a disappointment to the others," he muttered. "And after building the boat too! Ah well, I am beginning to understand the difficulties of a pioneer's life!"

He broke a hole in the ice with the heel of his boot, then proceeded to use his sponge vigorously. While he was thus engaged, Mac and the Captain came along with a similar purpose in view. "Hullo!" said the latter. "We'll make our start none too soon, Mac. Another day or so will see Linderman completely filled up."

"If we once got through into the main river," responded Mac a trifle dubiously, "we might manage to keep in front o' the ice. It's but a chance anyway, an' we can't better it."

Archie heard, and gathered up his belongings. "After all," he said to himself, "things may not be as serious as they look."

Then he remarked to Mac: "If we get safely out of this, do you think the water won't be frozen

farther north? I thought the frost would get keener as we went on."

"Ay, but against the question o' latitude, Archie, you must consider that Linderman is between three and four thousand feet above sea level. You can work out what that means in degrees, but we really know nothing about this country, so we'll just have to consider trouble as it comes."

"Are you aware that I've had breakfast waiting for full five meenits?" cried Stewart's wrathful voice near at hand, and that individual appeared on the scene bearing the evidences on his person of having been recently associated with the flour sacks. "I've made some magneeficent wee loaves," he continued, "and ——"

"We have been agitating ourselves on the ice question, Stewart," explained the Captain.

"Ice," answered the floury one disdainfully, "surely that slice on the water doesna trouble ye? Our boat will burst throo that as if — as if it werena there. Man, when I was up in the Arctic ——"

But his hearers had fled, all but Archie, and as Stewart and he followed after their hastening companions the unappreciated raconteur continued to unburden himself of sundry scathing remarks. "Here am I," he declaimed, brandishing a floury fist impotently, "the only man that kens aboot ice, the only man that has seen it in a' its splendiferous glory, an' yet — an' yet ——"

His remarks trailed off into silence more eloquent than words. Then he grasped Archie's shoulder, as if to restrain him from taking flight like the rest, and spoke feelingly in his ear.

" When I was up in Baffin Land —— "

" Blizzards, tornadoes, an' polar bears! " shouted Bill from the tent. " Ain't you comin' for breakfast? "

" Just my luck," groaned Stewart, and Archie could scarce repress a smile.

The launching of the boat was the next item on the morning's programme. All hands assisted in this performance, even Dave, the dog, betraying a lively interest in the proceedings, and the unwieldy craft plunged through the ice and into her native element to the accompaniment of much hearty cheering and not a little canine vociferation.

" She floats! She floats! " howled Stewart in great glee.

And float she certainly did, though she wavered uncannily for some time in the process.

" And what did you think? " said Mac with grave seriousness. " Have you actually been under the mistaken impression that it was a diving bell we had been building? "

" Wha kens? " murmured Stewart serenely. " It micht be anything by the look o' it."

" Let's give it a name, boys," suggested the Captain. " What about calling it after your sweetheart, Archie? "

Archie smiled. " I'm sure she would appreciate the honor, but —— "

Mac held up a deprecating hand. " For any sake don't honor the record breaker with any name you have any respect for. I'm much afraid she's goin' to be a cranky brute, an' I can foresee that many

a hard word o' abuse will be heaped on her old timbers before we go far."

"Cranky, is she?" laughed Bill. "Wal', I rather reckon she won't be so skittish when we dump our outfit on board."

This they proceeded to do without further delay, Stewart acting as stevedore while the rest carried the numerous sacks from the tent, so that in a short space the boat was loaded up almost to the gunwale, leaving room only on top for the oarsmen to perch as best they could.

"Now, heave ho, my lads, and get her off," cried Stewart, when nothing was left on shore. "A wee bit shove should send her crackin' through the ice like a streak."

And heave they did, but to no effect; then Archie who, like the others, had donned long gum boots for this trying emergency, waded out to the prow of the vessel to investigate matters. "Why," he cried, "she's grounded!"

"The more haste the less speed," remarked Mac. "Off with some o' these sacks, Stewart, an' we'll get her into deeper water before we've finished loading."

At last all was ready. The boat carried her heavy freight right buoyantly, and the men, wading waist deep around her, gingerly began to crawl over the gunwale to their several posts. Archie was relegated to the steersman's position, where he sat with the dog at his feet. Mac took the stroke oar, with the Captain perching close by on the port. Stewart and Bill, after much delicate manœuvring, succeeded in finding room to work their long sweeps near the bow.

"Now, my bold, bad buccaneers," said Mac, gripping his oar with purposeful intent, "she'll need a bit o' engine power to send her through the ice. Are you all ready?"

"Ready it is!" answered the Captain.

"Jest say the word," sang out Kentucky Bill.

"I'm fair burstin' wi' surplus energy," bubbled Stewart.

"Then let her go."

The long oar blades flashed, and cleft the water simultaneously. The dory shivered, gave one convulsive leap forward, a staggering sway sideward, then calmly heeled over and sank.

Words were all too feeble to express the feelings of the unfortunate crew who so unexepectedly found themselves struggling in the chill waters. Archie, having been nearest the shore, came off best in the mishap, for the shallowest part of the lake was reserved for his impromptu plunge, and he was on his feet in an instant. The others, however, were treated to the full process of immersion, and when the steersman looked he could see only their bedraggled heads bobbing like seals amid the miniature ice-floes as they endeavored to regain a footing. Dave alone seemed in no wise disturbed; his sportive antics rather flavored of rejoicing than of sorrow. Eagerly he swam around the dripping figures when they stood waist deep in the lake, surveying each other in helpless bewilderment, and his jubilant bark aroused the ire of Stewart at once.

"You four-footed chunk o' iniquity," he cried savagely. "Dae you actually think we're makin' whales o' oorsels for fun?" And he lunged forth a

grim hand to grapple with the unseemly merry-maker; but, failing to make good his hold, he dived once more into the depths, and the air was filled with the fulness of his grief.

The calamity overawed Archie for the moment; here at one fell stroke the entire outfit of the party had disappeared. What could be done now? Then Mac, still standing in the water, spoke, and the lad was both surprised and shocked at the words he uttered. And after this the Captain, usually so mild and moderate in his speech, opened his mouth, and language of fierce invective flowed therefrom. He was not surprised, after this, when Bill and Stewart both began to speak at once, and their words were fluent and forcible. Their combined eloquence reached its zenith in a final outpouring of the most scathing and opprobious epithets in at least two virile languages. And all this abuse was heaped upon the sunken boat which had forsworn their company so suddenly, so treacherously. Archie himself now felt a strange desire to say something derogatory also to swell the chorus; but a fresh outburst from Stewart at this moment of his inspiration so surely suited his own sentiments that he held his peace; nay more, he even ventured a word of rebuke to the eloquent one for his redundantly severe strictures, whereat Stewart's jaw relaxed in virtuous amazement.

"An' — an' could ony word in the dictionary express the injured nature o' my tender feelin's after such a cat-astrophe?" he bellowed plaintively "But I'll say nae mair I'll — I'll —" He turned again towards the vicinity of the submerged craft,

and with an air of feeble resignation on his face, hissed forth his concluding censure: "Oh you — you wicked, wicked boatie!"

Mac laughed. "Now you see, Archie," said he, "how vera injudicious it would have been to have named our handiwork. All the same, we ought to have tested her wi' the load before gettin' on board. I had an idea that she was cranky. Now it is a case o' salvin' the wreck, an' startin' all over again."

"And it ain't just a comfortable job nuther," chittered Bill. "I reckon we'd better begin at oncet."

"But won't everything be spoiled?" said Archie. "I thought the accident mean the end of all our plans."

"If it had happened in deep water, everything would be all U P for a dead cert," responded Bill; "but the smiling, innocent, gentle, cross-eyed polecat o' a barge went down in the handiest place after all."

While he was speaking he had been locating the sunken cargo with his feet, and shudderingly he now plunged his arms down into the icy element and drew to the surface a dripping sack of flour, which Archie took from him and placed on the beach. All hands then commenced grappling operations, and in a short time the bulk of the stores had been recovered. Fortunately the goods most liable to suffer from a wetting had been enclosed in waterproof bags; as for the flour, which was unprotected in this way, it was found to be affected only for about an eighth of an inch on the outside. Swelling at the first contact with the water, it had thus formed

a shielding film against the further inroads of enemy, so that the damage done was after all trifling.

" But where is my gun? " Mac groaned, v everything else had been accounted for. " I woul lose that wonderful firearm for all the other wea in the camp."

Now Mac's gun was a fearful and wonderful ot of offence. He had only unwound it from its w pings the day before, and all had been unanin in its praise. Its twin barrels were of an ex tionally large bore, and the enormous brass-bc cartridges which fitted at the breech were unto the shells of a modern quickfirer.

" Your wee cannon mebbe got grippit in the bo suggested Stewart.

They had almost forgotten the boat by this t their limbs were wellnigh frozen, and their clot was quickly becoming stiff and icebound. with a will they went to their new task With sc an effort they raised the submerged vessel until gunwale lipped the surface of the lake, but bey that they could not force her.

" We'll have to bale the water oot before s float," grumbled Stewart. " Another hour's w in which time we'll be like effigies oot o' a museu

" Why not raise her bottom side up? " as Archie. " It seems to me that would be the sim plan."

And he was right. In a few minutes the so of all their woes was lying high and dry on bank, and the shivering men were thawing th selves before a large fire. Mac's gun had been

recovered, entangled among some rope at the bottom of the boat, and this fact seemed to make him quite cheerful.

"It's surprising what a man can stand in this country," he said to Archie, as they steamed their garments into pliancy. "Here we are, after a quarter o' an' hour's most excruciating meesery, as fit as fiddles, an' ——"

A plaintive howl from Stewart interrupted him. That individual stood in an attitude expressive of the deepest despair, a pipe exuding water from its stem in one hand, and a dank brownish mixture in the other. "The tobacco, Mac, the tobacco," he wailed, and Mac groaned in sympathy. Then Bill and the Captain also joined in the song of lamentation. They had promptly discovered the one great and common misfortune which had befallen them. The tobacco store had suffered injury. Here was a calamity indeed! Nevertheless, being of a resourceful nature, it was not long before they devised a means of partially drying the seductive weed, and for a time this operation engrossed their entire attention.

It was Archie who set about investigating into the why and wherefore of the boat's unfriendly action. Having come to his own conclusion in the matter, he straightway began to take action. The dory was cranky, as Mac said, and its load, contrary to belief, had not eliminated its wayward qualities. What, then, was to be done? "Why, it just means putting something heavier than flour in the bottom," he reasoned. "We had too much top weight; that was why she turned turtle." He gathered

together several small yet heavy rocky boulders, and fitted them evenly across the broad, flat bottom of the dory, then he slid the boat gently back into the water. She floated true and steady, with not a trace of the old maliciousness in her movements.

"Ay, you've done it, Archie," admitted Mac, coming forward to watch the experiment. "That'll keep the centre o' gravity in the right place; but it's a pity I didn't let you try your hand with her at first. It's vera strange how we must always buy our knowledge with hard experience."

By this time all had managed to effect sundry changes of clothing, and were inclined to wax mirthful over their recent woes. It had been arranged that they should load up again after having dinner on shore, and meanwhile, under the influence of the great fire which the sorrowful Stewart had prepared, the damp sacks and general outfit of the party were rapidly steaming to dryness.

"I reckon if it hadn't been for Stewart I would have been drownded," quoth Bill. "You see, he sailed out'n the old barge first, and I landed on his back. If it had been the other way about I was a gone coon. I ain't no swimmer ——"

"So you were the incubus that kept my head below the water for sae lang," began the applauded hero wrathfully. "An' I was blamin' the dog. Come here, Dave, I apologize for makin' that clout at you. I am vera sorry indeed — that I missed." And Dave barked his appreciation right lustily.

Then Mac in reminiscent mood began: "Well do I mind o' a vera similar sort o' accident that happened to me ——"

"Oot in Sooth Ameriky," broke in Stewart eagerly. "Ay, Mac, that was a tre-mendous predicament. It ——"

"Who's tellin' the story, you or me?" interrupted Mac.

"Ca' canny, Mac, ca' canny," adjured Stewart soothingly. "I thought mebbe your natural modesty wouldna alloo you to dae justice to the subject."

"I shouldn't wonder but you're right," agreed Mac guilefully. "Now, you frozen flounder, get on with the yarn."

Somewhat taken aback, the interrupter hesitated a moment, but it was only for a moment, then he coughed discreetly and raucously declaimed: "When Mac was oot in Sooth Ameriky — " He paused; his hearers clustered nearer, but on Mac's face was the smile of the doubter.

"When Mac was out in South America," prompted Archie; then the narrator resumed.

"When Mac was oot in Sooth Ameriky, and — and — When Mac was oot in Sooth Ameriky — shootin' mosquitoes an' kangaroos — " Again the deputy storyteller paused.

"Yes, yes," voiced the audience breathlessly.

"Weel, when Mac was oot in Sooth Ameriky — I was up on the Greenland coast, and the whales were runnin' mountains high, an' the seas — I mean the mountains were runnin' whales high — no, the seas were runnin' mountains high, an' the whales — " He stopped, and looked at his fleeing comrades with the light of battle in his eye. Archie and the dog only remained to hear about the whales

Archie felt rather interested in whales, especially these whales, but Stewart did not immediately satisfy his curiosity.

"I'll tell the backslidin' Philistines that story even if I have to din it into their ears as they run," he muttered with grim decisiveness.

"But the whales, Stewart?" repeated Archie, just a shade mischievously.

"Weel, Archie, it was this way. When I was up in Davis Strait —" Here the dog began to howl in most melancholy fashion, and ere he could be pacified the others had returned, and Stewart swallowed his wrath and was silent, and Archie remained still in doubt regarding the subject of the whales.

The second aquatic attempt of the expedition was an unqualified success, the boat sitting firm and steady in the water when loaded and manned, and betraying no disposition to adopt its former disconcerting tactics. True, the freeboard between the gunwale and the water's edge looked dangerously meagre, but then if no storms arose this fact might be safely neglected. Risk there was, and risk there must ever be in pioneering voyages over strange waters. Archie and his comrades accepted this dictum without unduly enlarging upon it, and so their journey began.

The clear passage of Lake Linderman extended to the end of the waterway, and the distance, just over four miles, was negotiated in safety. Then came a mile portage for boat and stores over the rise to Lake Bennett, the second of the great lake chain forming the Yukon headwaters. It was here

that the long, ever-widening valley of the Yukon opened before the travellers' gaze. At the start numerous snowy mountain peaks seemed to enclose them, giving no hint of egress, but now these bleak sentinels, continued onward, marked a well-defined course towards the north, gradually receding backwards to right and left, so that the passage between was distinctly traceable even from a great distance.

Halfway down Lake Bennett the venturous voyagers sailed that day before they sought a camping place on shore, and when they resumed their onward journey in the morning they narrowly escaped turning up an inviting-looking branch of the lake in mistake for the main channel. Archie had a map, but it was soon found to be hopelessly inaccurate, and he began to steer almost wholly by his compass, choosing the more northerly course always where two offered, thus making the main direction sure. Indeed, before he had got through with the second day as steersman, he had been forced to the conclusion that his position was by no means a sinecure. Rocks, shoals, currents, floating timber — all these were his enemies. Then, again, he had to keep careful watch on the weather, lest a sudden storm might arise and take them unawares when sailing far from shore, and on Lake Bennett they were sometimes forced to keep a long way out on account of the lurking dangers from submerged rocks in the lee of the land.

CHAPTER VII

SHOOTING THE WHITE HORSE RAPIDS

FOR nearly a week their slow and dogged progress was kept up, and no untoward event occurred to mar the even course of their journeyings. Every night they camped in the shelter of the giant pines, which extended as an unbroken forest along the water's edge, and far back to the base of the lofty mountain chain on either side of the valley. Archie was careful to keep a note of each day's travel, with occasional remarks bearing on the features of the country at each halting place. His observant eye was never at rest, and his active brain was constantly storing up knowledge — for knowledge of a new country is sometimes beyond price, and Archie had a vague idea that perhaps the back trail might yet have to be taken when ice covered the waters and snow the forests and mountains, obscuring all but the frowning peaks in the background.

And the evenings were spent in a fashion fascinating to the youngest member of the party, and mightily agreeable to the others who dominated the conversation. Now the doughty Mac was in his element, and stories of life in other lands were related with telling effect, and eloquence unrivalled, by the gifted raconteur. And Stewart, too, was glad, for had he not now ample opportunity for

retailing some of his weird experiences in Arctic latitudes? Nemesis had come at last upon the doubting ones. If they would not listen in camp, if the Captain or Bill monopolized over much of the evening, then would the dire threat be hurled at their heads, the threat that seldom failed to subdue the enemy into a spirit of meek submission — the threat, the terrible threat, that he would relate his story to the bitter end on the following day, when the restricted limits of the boat would surely prevent escape.

Occasionally the Captain would entertain the company, but he rarely would speak of his own experiences, or, rather, he always attributed these to another, though Archie at least had a shrewd suspicion that the narrator was nevertheless the real centre of the adventures described. The Captain knew North-West Canada well, in parts; he could speak of the great Mackènzie River, and of the far northern settlements of the Hudson Bay Company; but at times he would check his narrative at an important juncture and relapse into morose silence, the silence of a man who has seen and who has suffered, and retains a memory hallowed to the past. And in these brief interludes Bill would sometimes launch forth on a wild story of the prairie, or a tale of life in the rough mining camps of the Western Rockies. And he could spin a yarn well. His breezy language and obvious honesty of purpose delighted Archie, and at no time were his efforts at entertainment more appreciated than when he forgot his listeners and dropped unconsciously into the quaint, yet virile vernacular of the great back-

woods, where most of his experience had been gathered.

Thus by daily stages they had reached the fourth great lake on the route, at the northern extremity of which the Yukon River proper was supposed to begin its long course; and on the sixth afternoon of their voyage they were only half a dozen miles distant from the issuing torrent. The Indians at Dyea had informed Mac that they would encounter a dangerous rapid after entering upon the flowing stream, a rapid known among the wandering tribes as the Rushing White Horses, but more commonly translated as the White Horse Rapids. So far the crew of the dory had had to work hard at the oars in order to make headway, and it must be confessed that they looked forward to the passage of the river with much satisfaction, for the current then would very materially assist them.

For the last two days the cold had been very intense, the thermometer hovering just on the zero point, and a wholesome dread of being frozen in hastened the movements of the rowers.

On this afternoon they were making strenuous endeavors to reach the end of the lake before nightfall. Slowly the heavily laden craft forged onwards, swaying ponderously at each oarstroke, and groaning in every plank, and harshly over the still waters sounded the creak of the rowlocks mingling with the plash of the blades.

"Keep her going, lads, keep her going," Mac would say at intervals in a tone of enticement. And keep her going they did, to the best of their ability; but the dory was not built for speed, and

she floundered clumsily under the forcing strain. Seated on his perch astern, Archie plied his paddle with a will, and kept an anxious eye on the heavens, which were quickly becoming obscured by a feathery white haze. He was not at all sure of the meaning of the phenomenon, so he set a gradual course for the land, which lay about half a mile distant to starboard. But before they had gone far in this new direction a distant sound, like the ominous muttering of a storm, smote upon his ears. His companions heard it too, and gave vent to their feelings in characteristic language.

"Another bloomin' blizzard," grumbled Stewart.

"Keep her head on for the shore, Archie," advised Mac with melancholy resignation.

"I don't think it will be a blizzard, boys," said the Captain, with an unusual concern showing in his features. "It's come up a bit too sudden for that."

Then a gentle breeze wafted across their faces, and in a moment the lake's surface was covered with rippling wavelets. Archie unconsciously put his hand up to his fur cap and pulled it down over his ears. He had become strangely cold, and yet the wind was but a breath after all. But ere they reached the shore a series of short, sharp blasts lashed the waters into foam, and Archie, forgetful of all discomforts, strove manfully to keep his unwieldy charge heading into the storm. And he did not notice that his thick coat was a mass of spangles where the spray had fallen, nor that his limbs had become strangely numbed. Then from the shore came several sharp echoes, like the cracking of mighty whips, followed by the thunder of falling

timber, and the crew of the dory rested from their labors and gazed with awe on the devasting scene which met their vision. Gigantic pines were crashing down amid the forest, here, there, and everywhere; and the shore line, even as they looked, was strewn with the fallen monarchs.

" Why, the wind does not seem so very strong after all! " cried Archie in amazement; " in fact it wouldn't be a bit uncomfortable if it weren't so confoundedly chilly."

Everyone in the boat was shivering most palpably, despite their heavy clothing, and Stewart blew at his mittened hands gustily.

" How's the thermometer, Archie? " asked the Captain. " I think I know what is the matter with the trees."

Archie fished out the thermometer from a sack near his feet, gave one glance at it, then gasped in dismay. Why, it registers thirty degrees below zero, and — and it is falling fast."

" That's what's the matter with the timber then," said the Captain. " Frozen pines will crack over like pipe stems, in a breeze."

The gale subsided with startling suddenness as they were speaking; it cut short off as if some unseen influence had peremptorily subdued its strength, and only the loud crackling of the pines broke the deadly calm that prevailed.

Though it was yet early in the afternoon the darkening shadows of night were quickly closing in. The sun's short arch in the heavens had been completed; in half an hour more only the light of the stars would show the way.

"We'd better get alongside and camp," said Mac. "We can't hope to reach the end o' the lake to-night after all. Give way, lads! Get the torpedo-boat destroyer on the move again!"

The rowers bent to their oars, and Archie's paddle swung to position. A grating, sliding sound was heard as the long sweeps encountered some resisting element, and skidded swiftly therefrom into the air. Stewart and Bill fell back among the sacks. Mac and the Captain regained their equilibrium with an effort. Archie found himself clutching on to the stern post, with one leg dangling over the gunwale, and Dave jumped overboard amidst the excitement. Then they looked at one another in bewilderment. Next they peered over the side of the boat and glanced all round with increasing dismay.

"Wal' I'll be gol' dashed an' kicked," murmured Bill, breaking the spell. "I reckon I've heard a fair-sized number o' tall yarns, 'bout frost, an' ice, an' whales, but I'll never disbelieve any galoot again."

There was ample reason for their perplexity. The dory was fast wedged in a transparent mass of ice, and, far as the eye could reach, the lake showed, brittle as glass. The waves had been frozen in their natural form, and even the cresting white foam had been preserved in its crystal casement. With the one unspeakably grand effort King Frost had checked the rising gale and asserted his own authority to rule in the grim north land.

Mac was the first to return to a practical sense of his duties.

"If we wait much longer to admire the wonders

o' Nature, lads," he said, "we'll never be able to dig the boat out o' its frame. Let us break a channel with the butt end o' the oars, an' get ashore."

At once all sprang to action, and for the space of a minute the vitreous lake's surface resounded with their blows. But the effect was scarcely noticeable; the dory remained motionless as a sculptor's marble amid her strange surroundings. Meanwhile Dave gambolled about on the ice, barking noisily. Then Stewart gingerly insinuated one leg over the bow and levered powerfully. It was no use. He followed up this manœuvre by putting the other leg over also, and Archie expected to see him pay the price of his temerity at once; but still nothing happened. The ice bore his weight without yielding.

"Ah well!" said the adventurer, "if we canna get the boatie ony farther, we can at least walk ashore." And he marched off, whistling dismally.

"Hang it, we'll need to get the old barge out o' this somehow!" exclaimed Bill.

So they all thought. But how was it to be done?

"If we had only got a wee bit farther," hazarded Mac, "the chances are that the suction o' the Yukon would have kept the water from freezin'. Not that I would have minded much if the ice had kept an orthodox shape, but it would be a hard trial to pull the boat across these frozen waves."

"Isn't it possible," spoke up Archie, "that the ice on the deep water near the middle of the lake may be thinner than it is here, just as it was at Linderman?"

The suggestion was received with appreciation. "Maybe you're right, Archie," admitted Mac," and

if we once got clear o' our present encumbrances we'd soon make a try to skid the dory out in that direction."

"Why can't we thaw the happy home out?" queried the Captain. "A circle of fires round about would soon make a hole in the ice, I think."

While they were considering the various schemes proposed, Stewart emerged from the forest staggering under a lusty young pine that had evidently been one of the Frost King's victims. "I'll vera soon gie ye a clear passage," he shouted; "just wait till I bring over my wee battering ram."

Right valiantly he struggled with his load.

"Blow me tight, boys, I believe Stewart has hit the genuine idea right plumb on the head," growled Bill, leaping out to the assistance of his companion. A loud rending crack at this juncture warned the tree bearer of the impending danger. "Keep awa' from me," he yelled at his would-be assistant; but Bill did not seem to understand, and with the best of intentions drew nearer, while the agonized one in the danger zone beseeched him in the rudest of language to keep off. Again the ominous splitting echoes smote the stillness, and Stewart, dropping his burden with alacrity, made a wild break for the boat. Nor was his caution premature, for where the heavy log fell the water spurted up. But undoubtedly Stewart had demonstrated the only feasible method of clearing a passage, and within a very short space the entire party had gone ashore with axes to secure a number of similar logs.

By the time they had cut and trimmed their ice-fighting weapons it had grown quite dark, and

the somewhat disappointed little group resolved to prepare their evening meal before doing anything further. Then it was that Archie stirred up their dulling enthusiasm. " Why can't we try and break a channel to the Yukon to-night? " he said. " We can see well enough in the starlight, and if we wait until morning before making a start the ice may have grown twice as thick."

The idea at first had been merely to free the boat and get it taken alongside the shore, but now Archie's words aroused in them a new strain of hope. They were barely six miles from the end of the lake, and very possibly thinner ice would prevail as they approached the issuing flood. " I agree wi' you, Archie," said Mac.

" An' me." " An' me," echoed Bill and Stewart.

" And I believe we'll get there all right," climaxed the Captain cheerfully.

Hurriedly they swallowed their coffee and damper, and made haste to put their new plan into execution. No accident marred their return journey to the boat, which looked like a spectral craft in the ghostly glimmer of the stars, and soon the thud, thud of their ponderous implements resounded out into the night, and the answering gurgle of the freed water intimated clearly enough that the heavy onslaught was meeting with due reward. Soon a circular space was cleared in which the dory was able to swing round towards her outward course, then foot by foot she moved ahead, leaving a glittering trail of crackling, crashing ice floes in her wake. Stewart and Bill wielded their titantic hammers from the bow, and Mac and the Captain belabored

the enclosing masses from amidships. Archie's paddle alone, for a time, provided the motive power which sent the boat along so slowly into the jagged clearing created.

Thud! splash! thud! splash! went the battering logs, and through the crystalline expanse the dory made steady passage. For over an hour the crew continued their tireless toil without cessation, and in that period they had barely progressed half a mile; but now they were nearing the middle of the lake, and the besetting icefield was gradually becoming less and less tenacious, while occasionally the boat would rear itself up on the edge of the pack, and by its own weight press down and crush the flaking barrier.

"It's breaking awa', you hard-workin' sinners. It's breakin' awa!" roared Stewart delightedly at last, smashing about him with great gusto; and surely enough the icy element at this stage seemed to burst asunder before the dory's advancing prow. Almost immediately thereafter some heavy obstacle ground harshly against the port quarter of the vessel, and but for Archie's watchful paddle would have shouldered them from their course. "Hullo!" muttered the lad; "that bump came from behind. I wonder what's the meaning of it?"

Anxiously he peered into the gloom astern, but nothing was revealed to his view; yet if his eyes failed him at this moment his alert ears were not at fault. A gentle, rippling murmur pervaded the air now and again, broken by a jarring crackle as of ice floes in conflict. He turned his glance towards the distant forest on the right, and through the

tree tops he located a radiant star, on which he kept careful watch for fully a minute.

"Yes," he said at length, "we're moving a long way faster than I am paddling —" Then he recollected himself. "Why," he muttered, "I haven't been using my paddle at all these last few minutes! There is surely something wrong. Mac!" he cried. "Mac! We must be near the main river, and we're travelling about five miles an hour instead of crawling along like a snail as we thought. Look at the trees passing beneath that bright star over there."

Mac, aroused at the words, dropped the log he had been using, and stood silent for a moment, carefully observant.

"By Jupiter, Archie, you're right!" he cried; then his voice rang out above the din created by the ice-breakers in the bow: "Stand by your oars, lads! Backwater! Backwater!"

With a will each individual sprang to his task, only vaguely understanding that some calamity threatened, and steadily they strained back from the floe they had so ruthlessly been endeavoring to disintegrate. At once a succession of shocks thrilled through their little craft from stern to stem, and great blocks of drift ice piled high aft until they almost reached the steersman's perch. Vainly Archie lunged at the gathering sheets with his paddle, but they were not to be removed. In the darkness he could not see that the obstacles he was trying to deflect were larger than the boat itself. Bump, bump, bump, went the grinding floes; and Archie shuddered, not because of the cold, but with the tense fear that one of these floating dangers might

strike the dory's beam and rip open her rough timbers.

"You can't hold against it," he cried, "and the ice will come aboard if you try any longer."

"Can you see the shore yet, Archie?" asked Mac hoarsely.

"Only the far side we left; the timber is still showing on the sky line, but it seems to be moving farther away."

"Steer cannily for the opposite bank then, my laddie. It should be nearer, though you don't see it; we dare not risk being dragged into the river in the dark. We could never made a landing this side o' White Horse."

"What in howlin' blizzards is the matter, Archie?" asked Bill from the bow. "I don't savvy this here rumpus a bit."

And the young steersman answered calmly: "We've got caught in the race leading to Miles's cañon and the White Horse Rapids."

Even as he spoke a wall of deeper darkness than before grew suddenly in on the right, shutting out trees and stars alike, and on the left a low, beetling headland loomed eerily out of the shadow. "We're in the cañon! We're in the cañon!" he cried.

"Risk her broadside on, Archie," grunted Mac. "Swing her round to port. We'll have to chance striking something softer than a rock."

The paddle cleft the rushing flood ere he had finished. The frail craft spun half-round, and trembled as she met the full force of the iceladen stream.

"Backwater on the port!" bellowed the stroke

oar. "Stewart, you howlin' dervish, stand ready to make fast!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" roared the watchful one at the prow.

There came a slight concussion, followed by a gliding jar, as the flat bottom of the dory smelled the ground; then Stewart sprang out into the blackness with a coil of rope in his hand. A moment more and the boat was dragged safely on to a pebbled beach beyond the reach of the torrent.

"Well, I rather think we've come a bit farther than we intended," laughed the Captain, gathering some driftwood to make a fire.

"It's a blessed thing," said Mac, "that we didn't go still farther. If we hadn't managed to haul in here we should have been over the White Horse like a streak. Now the Indians say it's a vera dangerous job shootin' the rapids even at the best o' times, an'. I'm thinkin' they didn't consider it possible to make the journey in the company o' miniature icebergs ——"

"Great snakes! What a circus it would have been, skirmishing over in the night!" interpolated Bill.

Archie did not make any comment; he was thinking that the circus so-called would have had rather a grim ending; further, he had just discovered that the Fates had been mercifully kind in directing them to land where they did, for had they essayed to beach the boat farther up they would assuredly have come to grief on the line of rocky boulders which now showed dimly against the white flood, and had they gone even a few yards farther down,

the bare walls of the cañon would have met their safety-seeking prow. He sat down near the fire and watched Steward prepare their second supper that day, and he marvelled at the happy smile that beamed on his features. Then Dave came up noiselessly and thrust his shaggy head under his master's arm.

They went to bed early that evening, for indeed they were all tired out with their exertions, and as Archie slept with his head pillowed on Dave's furry back, his dreams carried him back to the old land and to the dear ones at home he might never see again. In the silent watches of the night he awoke. "Why," he muttered drowsily, "what a strange dream I've had, or was it a dream? Where am I? What ——"

But the answer was borne swiftly to his ears in the crackling murmur of the ice-bearing flood as it dashed on its way towards the dreaded White Horse.

The camp roused itself when the first gray streaks of dawn were beginning to illuminate the sky, and then the sight that met their gaze was cheerlessly uncompromising. Before them swept a seething current whose surface was but a clashing mass of detached ice fragments. And here and there miniature crystal towers, forced upwards from the rudely jostling obstructions, flashed briefly in the dull light, and then dissolved back into the surf like fairy castles of a vision. Scarce any clear water was to be seen; the boat that would launch on this foaming tide must buffet with the ice for its room, and yet Archie's camp companions did not

seem in any way disheartened. Their gaze was more curious than concerned. Hardened pioneers they were all; risks to them were as the zest of life. By sheer daring they would conquer even in face of almost certain disaster. But the youngest member of the expedition felt gravely anxious. On him as navigator a dire responsibility lay. Once afloat on that swirling flood, the passage of the rapids must be made. There could be no return; a stout heart and a steady hand alone might save them. Dimly in his ears rang the warning note of caution, but beckoning, ever beckoning, was the spirit of the wild, luring him on, besetting him body and brain, calling him to this task she had provided for those who would enter her silent domain. And the wild triumphed.

"It's for you to say, Archie," Mac announced after breakfast. "Are we goin' to attempt the voyage or not? It's risky, laddie. I daren't advise it, but the others want to try."

"And try we will, then," cried the lad. "We'll shoot the White Horse Rapids, ice or no ice. I'm ready now."

They arranged themselves around the dory, waiting an opportunity to precipitate her into the stream, and some minutes passed in silence. Then came their chance, and with a rasping plunge the little craft shot out into a foaming interstice between two giant floes. "In you go, you sinners!" yelled Stewart, clutching fast to the painter, and prancing about up to the knees in water; and over the sides they clambered, Dave leaping in among the last. In another instant they were buffeting broadside-on

in midchannel, Stewart even then having scarcely got his feet over the prow. With dexterous strokes Archie strove to get his staggering charge headed down stream, and this result he ultimately attained by levering against the solid around him with the reverse end of his paddle. Then with oars balanced ready, but not in use, the dory careered down with the flood, keeping her place in the water by sheer weight alone, and moving at the same speed as her dangerous enemies.

About an hour passed. The walls of the cañon now rose steeply on either side, almost shutting out the light of day, and their glassy sides reverberated with the clashing echoes of the rushing floes. But a more ominous sound than this was gradually making itself heard; a faint, dull roar it seemed to be at first, but ever increasing in volume as the dory swept nearer and nearer. And the tense nerves of the boatmen thrilled at the warning note, for it was the distant boom of the rapids they heard. The dreaded White Horse was heralding its presence, yet afar off. Afar off and yet near for the current was flowing towards it at the rate of fully ten miles an hour. A few minutes more, only a few minutes more! Grimly Archie wedged himself in his place, so that he could lean far back over the stern with safety, and his grip on the steering paddle tightened. Louder and louder grew the awe-inspiring roar of the hurtling torrent, and the dory began to dash faster and faster towards the unknown trial, showing a deadly tendency to swing round helplessly on the iceladen waters, room, ite Archie's frantic efforts to keep her heading

"WITH A BOUND THE LITTLE CRAFT BURST INTO THE CHAOS BEYOND"

straight. The noise was now deafening in its intensity, and the speed of the dory was ever increasing, while she was also becoming more and more unmanageable each second.

"I can't keep her straight," groaned Archie to himself. Then Mac's hoarse voice was heard above the din:

"Stand by the oars! Give her steering way! Altogether, my lads!"

Crack! splash! grind! went the great blades, at times skimming the water, but more often levering against the encircling ice. Yet their efforts, seemingly so puny, were successful, and the dory cleft ahead, outdistancing the leaping current and answering promptly to the sweep of the steersman's paddle. Round an obscuring bluff they swung at terrific pace, then an exclamation of horror forced itself from Archie's lips. He alone could see what was ahead, and what he saw was sufficient to unnerve even the stoutest heart. Before him uprose a dense cloud of spray which obscured all beyond, and the mighty rumble of falling waters filled his ears.

"Keep her going! Keep her going!" he yelled, striking his paddle deep in the water, and steering straight into the centre of the foam.

"Send her along, lads! Bend to it!" bellowed Mac once more.

And right nobly they responded. With backs bowed they bent to their labors, and the long sweeps swung to and fro with lightning rapidity. Into the boiling surf they dashed, into the flying mists. Then with a bound the little craft burst into the

chaos beyond. Clear into the air she sprang, coming down again with a plunge that almost sent her beneath the waves, while a rain of icy debris showered upon her timbers; then out from the mists she sped, and rushed like an arrow from the bow, straight at a grim torrent-deflecting headland which upreared in her course. But Archie's eyes were true, and his grip on the steering blade firm. He leaned far out over the stern posts, and, with all his strength concentrated into one grand stroke, swept his paddle round, and the dory's prow spun into safety with but a few inches to spare. A moment more and they were floating in untroubled waters, with the roar of the rapids behind them. Then only did the rowers pause, then only did Archie relax his vigilant care.

"Wal' I reckon that was a mighty fine picnic," drawled Bill. "I thought I was a gone coon for sartain 'bout a minute ago."

And now Stewart, whose face had grown the color of a boiled lobster by reason of his strenuous exertion, stood up in his place and opened his mouth: "My sinfu' brethren," said he, "the fact that our vera unworthy carcasses are here an' no' — elsewhere, is due to the magneeficent abilities displayed by ane o' oor ship's company. I'll no' mention names, but I may as weel indicate that he sits at the other end o' the boat from me an' uses a paddle; so none o' you oar pushers need get conceited. I'm moved wi' tearfu' emotion —— "

He stopped to locate the necessary tear, during which proceeding the Captain made grave utterance in a similar if more impressive strain. Archie was

beginning to feel rather embarrassed, but before he felt called upon to make any reply an unexpected diversion took place. The dory, which had been gently drifting down stream, suddenly came to a halt before a jagged bank of ice boulders that stretched across their course, apparently the driftage from above the rapids.

"More trouble!" grunted Stewart, seizing the heavy log which still lay near him in the bow, and bestowing its weight sturdily on the barring fringe. But this time the battering ram had no effect. The ice floes had become welded together in one solid mass, too strong by far for human power to break; and this was not all, for some little distance ahead, beyond the limit of the driftage, a broad glistening band extended onwards and onwards till it blended with the distant perspective of the wooded plains on either side. There could be no doubt about it: the Yukon had indeed entered upon its long term of imprisonment to the icy monarch; its waters were frozen fast and solid. Oh the irony of it! To dare the dangers of the last few hours for this. The passage which they had so fondly expected to find open was barred to them. The disappointment was cruel after all that the impetuous travellers had suffered. Yet not a man murmured.

"It had to be, sooner or later, boys," said the Captain.

"When I think o' it," began Stewart thoughtfully, "I'd rather skid along the ice, an' work my passage, than sit like a mummy in a frame, wi' an oar stuck in my cauld fist."

Mac meanwhile had clambered over the rough

intervening expanse to investigate the nature of things beyond, and he now came back looking cheerful as usual. "Why, my lads," said he, "we ought to slide down the river easily enough if the ice keeps as it is. Let's get the boat across an' put skids under her. I don't see why she shouldn't make as good a sledge as she did a boat."

"Hoorah!" cried Bill. "Heave ho with the happy home, boys!"

And they heaved to such good purpose that the little vessel which had served them so well was soon transported over to the smooth ice, with all her stores intact. Dave, at this stage, began to take a remarkable interest in the proceedings, and barked with sheer joy when the work of transformation was completed. Clearly he realized that his turn to show his mettle was now come.

And since it had been decided to force the long ice trail northwards, it was surprising how quickly the drooping spirits of the wanderers recovered their wonted buoyancy. Stewart went about his work singing gaily, to the intense disgust of his associates, who, however, joined boisterously in the chorus with a hearty enthusiasm that caused the guileful one to smile knowingly; and Mac was roused to such an extreme of irresponsible good nature that his compatriot could but gasp — when he was not otherwise engaged — at the eloquently abusive epithets that were let loose in the air for his especial benefit.

It was yet early in the day when the boat sledge was ready for its journey, and filled with a burning desire to see how their new method of locomotion

was going to work, they waited only long enough to swallow a cup of coffee before proceeding to fix up a system of haulage, and get into harness. At last all was arranged. Two straps attached to a collar around Dave's neck were connected with the bow of the dory, and twin ropes, fastened to port and starboard quarters provided a means for four men pulling in diverging lines. To Archie was relegated the duty of leading the trail without encumbrance other than his rifle.

" Now, my bonnie lads," spoke Mac, when all was clear, " stand by your respective engines."

At once Dave's traces drew taut, and his paws scraped furiously on the ice; then to the amazement of the beholders he lunged violently to the right, and almost immediately to the left, after which performance he again struggled forward in his harness till it seemed as if the thongs must break.

" By the Great Dominion, that dog knows something! " cried the Captain. " He's actually broken out the caravan himself." And in truth the ponderous iceship had slowly begun to move with the dog's unaided efforts.

" We can't allow you to do it all yoursel', Davie," said Mac, and he strained powerfully at the rope over his shoulder, an example which the others emulated at once. Slowly, slowly, the great sledge glided forward, gathering momentum every instant until it forced the pullers to break into a run, and Archie ahead had to increase his pace considerably in order to keep his position. Loudly barked Dave, in happy elation, and from the lips of the runners exclamations of surprise and satisfaction issued forth.

"Keep her buzzing, you ruggie duggies! Keep her buzzing, Mac," panted Stewart, stretching out in fine style.

"An' who's stoppin, you insignificant, broken-winded donkey-engine?" retorted his more burly companion, trundling along manfully.

The boom of the rapids grew faint in the backward distance, and the silence of the great forests stole over the scene, yet still the sleigh pullers kept up their unwearied march along the frozen trail.

CHAPTER VIII

A LYNX, A BEAR, AND A YUKON PUDDING

Ice travel in the sub-Arctic regions seldom continues day after day as simple as it seems at first sight, and the early stages of a journey over a newly frozen river or lake cannot therefore be taken as a criterion of what future progress may prove. A first frost may produce a beautifully smooth and glassy sheet of ice, over which great loads could be conveyed with a minimum of effort, and if the cold intensity thereafter kept strictly normal and unvarying, calculations might safely be made standardizing the actual power required for all ice-haulage purposes. But it is here that Nature usually intervenes. Her mighty stretch is beyond the power of man to compass. The frost which stills the waters is but an earnest of what is to follow. In northern latitudes snow rarely falls during the severest period of winter, but instead a fine tinder-like hoar condenses from the surcharged ether, and descends in almost invisible showers, covering the newly formed ice with a scintillating mantle which at once destroys its pristine gloss and renders it beady and harsh. Then, again, as the thermometer keeps falling, the solid body of the stream contracts and rends under the increasing strain, so that great

gaps and obstructing "blows" are created in its course.

Thus it happened that the enthusiastic quintette which left White Horse at such a sprightly gait discovered within a few short days that their sleighing undertaking had ceased to appeal to them as an amusing pastime, and had evolved itself into a work not widely distinguishable from hard labor. Their first real indication of the growing difficulties of the trail met them at the junction of the Big Salmon River, which they reached after three days' hard travel. Here the conflicting currents had apparently made strenuous fight against the frost, and the floes from the fierce-rushing tributary stream were flung far across the track, in places piling over ten feet high. To surmount these obstacles was found to be no easy matter, and, even after they had been negotiated, further deterrent features of the trail began to appear more and more obvious. The deepening snow film clung with tenacious grip to the long sleigh runners as the weary pullers stumbled and struggled and strove with utmost effort, and the iceship forced ahead with ever-diminishing speed. Yet still the little band refused to be daunted.

They were soon compelled, however, to reorganize their system of travel, and this they did very drastically. The dory was ruthlessly reduced to its elements, and its lighter boards used in the construction of two new sleighs. Its weight, though little felt on the smooth ice at the start, was a very considerable handicap on the crisp white course they were now traversing. They discarded their

boots, which had already suffered severely by contact with the sharp-edged drifts, in favor of raw-hide moccasins, which luckily formed a part of their outfit, and these they found more comfortable on their feet and more sure in their grip on the glistening track.

Under this new order of things they made better headway and with less exertion, so that hope again was their friend and cheerful counsellor. Day after day they continued their stubborn march, camping each evening on the warmth-giving snowwreaths of the fringing forest, and striking their tent at the first sign of approaching dawn, like the wandering Arabs of more southern climes. Day after day a silence grim and profound reigned over all, but in the nocturnal watches the wooded slopes now seemed to wake and tremble with dread echoes that rendered the impressive stillness which they broke even more appalling. The harsh rending of the ice on the river, the whiplike crackle of the timber as the frost sought into its heart — such sounds had grown common enough during the last week, but a new element was beginning to enter in among these distractions of the dark, and the weary travellers turned restlessly in their blankets as the awesome voicings of the denizens of the wild thrilled fearfully through the air, warning them of danger not before considered. Faint at first, and grimly muttering, were these demoralizing sounds, but each night found them growing in clamor and fierceness, until at length the long hours of darkness were almost wholly given over to the weird symphonies of Nature's savage creatures. The deep,

low growl of the bear, the snarling scream of the lynx, the mournful wail of the wolf — these were the prevailing notes of the forest after the sun had set, and as Archie listened he clutched his rifle tighter beside him, and wondered vaguely how his companions could sleep so soundly through it all. Dave, too, would ofttimes start up, hair bristling and ears erect, and send forth a full-throated challenge to his unseen enemies.

They were still two days' travel from the Pelly River when they drew up their sleighs into the shelter of the timber on the left bank of the Yukon. Far to the east and west the lofty heights flanking the valley could be seen towering steeply into the clouds and seeming to merge therewith, so similar were their snow-white aspects; intervening, an unbroken belt of pine, spruce, and birch extended, funereal and solemn in its spectral hoary capping.

"It's nearly four o'clock, lads," shouted Mac, as he and Stewart, aided by Dave, pulled the first sleigh into the camping space Archie had sought out.

"That means we hiv been seven thunderin' long hours on our little tootsies," remarked Bill, who with the Captain formed the motive power of the second conveyance. "By the great Mississippi, Mac, you make the trail a bit sudden. I reckon we've covered 'bout twenty-eight miles this blessed day."

"That should make us about two hundred miles north of White Horse," returned Mac complacently. "Well, that's not so bad; we'll get there in time, as the porcupine said to the alligator —— "

"I'm deid! I'm slaughtered! I'm — I'm paraphrased!" howled Stewart, clutching his right foot tenderly in his hand, and executing an involuntary war dance with the disengaged member. At once all clustered round.

"You don't need to waltz about like a dancing bear, even if you are so sorely afflicted," commented Mac unsympathetically. "You should be more circumspect and solemn on such an occasion, I'm thinkin'. Now, where did the mosquito bite you?"

"It's my big toe," raved the woeful one.

"And what's the matter with your toe, Stewart?" asked the Captain anxiously.

"It'll no twirl, an' I dinna feel it, an' — ouch! I'll hae your life for that, you Pharisee!"

The Captain had suddenly caught the injured man's moccasin in his strong grasp and given it a hearty wrench. "Why! did that hurt you?" he said. "Then your toe will waggle all right if you rub it with snow. It's just a bit frozen, that's all."

"I reckon my twiddlers have come a buster, too," groaned Bill. "They're as stiff as icicles. I guess I'll have to chop them off."

"What will we do if we lose our feet, Billy?" enquired Stewart thoughtfully and with much earnestness.

"I would suggest the use o' stilts," murmured Mac unsympathetically.

It was almost dark before they got the tent erected; the waning moon would not be visible until late that evening; and already the disturbing

noises of night had begun. Stewart and Bill, having relegated all thoughts of their threatening infirmities to oblivion, were busy preparing supper, which was exactly the same as breakfast or dinner — when they had any. Indeed, all meals were alike, for the essential food of cold latitudes does not admit of much variety. Mac and the Captain had gone down to the river to dig a water hole in the ice — no easy task, as the solid covering of the Yukon was now over two feet thick.

Archie, who usually attended to the building of the bear fire — an institution inaugurated but a few days ago for the purpose of frightening off prowling intruders, — set off, axe in hand, to secure the necessary logs. It had been his custom always to drag in the fallen and blasted timber for this purpose, but on the present occasion he started out rather late on his mission, and the heavy gloom filling the interstices of the forest made it impossible for him to discern anything lying on the ground. So he resolved to fell one or two young trees near the camp for his fire, and straightway his axe rang out on the trunk of a lusty spruce giant whose feathering branches reached high overhead. The light of the cooks' fire cast a lurid reflection all round, and illuminated the clear space beneath the lower branches, which, extending fanlike, united to form a vast roof stretching into distant gloom, under which the numerous tree trunks showed like pillars bearing up sombre night.

At the first blow the resinous wood swayed and cracked loudly; then Dave, who was standing by watching operations, gave vent to an odd warning

growl, and rushing at the tree scratched at its bark viciously.

"Oh, you can't push it down, Dave!" laughed Archie. "Wait till I have another smash at it." Yet still the tree trembled and gave forth strange sounds. Once more the axe swung round and fell, and this time the tree, though wellnigh a foot in diameter, fractured clean in two at the point of impact. For a brief moment it suspended quiveringly by reason of its upper fronds entangling with those of its neighbors, then down it toppled. "Hurrah!" shouted the lad, but his exclamation of delight was quickly changed into a cry of horror. Simultaneously with the tree falling an unearthly scream issued from among its clustering branches, but it was drowned by Dave's long, snarling bark. Dimly through the shadows Archie became aware of a curling catlike creature leaping upon him from the descending timber. Blindly he jumped aside, and none too soon, for even as he did so he felt his sleeve rip up before a terrible claw. Then it flashed upon him suddenly that this was a lynx he had disturbed, one of those fierce tigerish animals he had heard so often yet never seen. "Dave! Dave!" he cried, swinging round with axe upraised to meet the savage foe. But Dave was there even before the words were uttered. He met the lynx in midair as it was making its second spring, met it with the full force of his hundred pound weight of concentrated brawn and sinew, and his great square jaws closed with a snap on the thick furred throat of his natural enemy; then dog and lynx rolled over and over at Archie's feet, locked in deadly embrace.

Again and again Archie raised his axe; but the light was dim and the combatants were scarcely distinguishable from one another, and he feared to strike lest he might perchance wound Dave; but round and round he followed the struggling creatures, so closely that his moccasins were torn to shreds by the whirling claws of the dog's antagonist. Loud rang the yells of the lynx as it strove to free itself and at the same time disembowel its opponent, but Dave answered only by muffled growls; in the grip of his teeth did his safety lie, and well did he seem to know it. Adroitly he pivoted about, sometimes on his back, sometimes on his sides, sometimes on his feet, but ever wary of the sweeping, deadly claws.

Before the fierce combat had lasted half a minute Stewart and Bill had hurried up, both armed with their rifles, yet, like Archie, they found it impossible to interfere. Then Mac and the Captain hastily approached, the former loading his ponderous gun as he ran.

"I'll not have Dave killed," he cried. "Stand back, lads — " He raised his weapon, but it was Archie who pressed down the gaunt twin barrels.

"Don't shoot, Mac," he said quietly; "at this range you would probably kill them both."

Next Stewart rushed for a burning brand from his fire, and at the unwelcome glare the lynx roused itself to fiercer energy. With the agility of its kind it seemed never to be a second in the one position, though its throat was still surely pinned in Dave's vicelike grip. And at length its gyrating claws met the obstacle they had been seeking, and in a moment

the snow was red with blood, Dave's blood chiefly. The helpless onlookers groaned in despair.

"I must chance it," cried Mac, and Archie no longer made objection, but the finale came before he pulled the trigger.

The great mastiff, making never a sound despite the pain of its cruel wounds, attempted no longer to evade the ripping claws. He concentrated all his strength into one supreme effort. His whole weight was flung into action. Over the lynx rolled once more, but this time it remained where it lay. Dave's mighty jaws had at last got their vital hold and clenched through. The lynx lay still. Its claws no longer were to be feared. Dave scrambled to his legs, weak and staggering, and barked feebly.

"By the whale that swallowed Jonah, that war' a fight!" burst out Bill. "Good dog, Dave! Good lad!"

But Dave was rubbing his lacerated body gently on Archie's knee.

"I've known of a wolf tackle a lynx," muttered the Captain, "but the wolf died. I don't believe there's another dog between this and New York could have come out of that skirmish. In fact a dog won't face a lynx as a rule."

"He did it for me," said Archie, "and oh! I hope he is not seriously hurt."

"He'll manage to carry the damage a' right," grunted Stewart, making a hasty examination of Dave's injuries. "He's got twa vera bad scratches along his wee stomjack, but I'll soon plaster them up. Come along, Davie, and get something to eat."

They all walked off, leaving Mac and Archie

alone. Grimly Mac raised the body of the lynx and disclosed its cruel claws. "Ay, Archie," said he, quietly, "Silver Water's gift was more precious than we thought. You've got to thank Dave for your life, laddie."

"I know it," responded the youth simply.

That night was spent in unusually pleasant fashion. Dave's wounds, though deep and painful, were not by any means serious, and, after having had them dressed by Stewart and Archie, the brave dog seemed not a whit the worse. Nevertheless Mac suggested that a day's halt should be made at this stage. "It'll give the doggie a rest," said he, "an' at the same time we can take the opportunity for repairing our sadly wilting sartorial glory."

"I reckon it would be a fair thing," agreed Bill heartily.

Indeed there was a wonderful unanimity in the responses that hailed Mac's tentative speech. Two hundred miles on the icy trail had somewhat sapped their energies, though not their courage, and they welcomed a rest right gladly. Then Stewart lifted up his voice, and with a beaming smile thus addressed his associates:

"I'll mak' a real sumshus repast for you tomorrow; I'll mak — a gorgeous feast." And so strong were his anticipatory delights that he glided into doleful song, and fully half a verse had escaped from him before the assault came.

"It's not right o' you to make such an unseemly row," commented Mac when the storm had subsided.

The vocalist looked around him mournfully, then

apostrophized the tent roof in words which ought to have melted the icicles beginning to form on the ridge pole. "Even in the Arctic wilds my sweet voice maun remain dumb. It's no' righteous, it's — it's ——"

"Surely you would give the bonnie wee bears a chance," pleaded Mac. "The fact is, you blue-haired narwhal, that, whereas we don't object to you oiling up your unmelodious trumpet in the daytime, we much misdoubt the wisdom o' such a performance in a restricted place like the tent."

"I'll mak' no more complaint," murmured the offender. "Now, Mac, are you goin' to tell us a' aboot that wonderfu' experience you had in China, or will I heave up anchor an' start in mysel'?"

"I think it's Archie's turn to-night," laughed the Captain. "If we don't divide the honors, I'm afraid our stock of honest yarns will run dry before we reach the Klondike."

"Yes, let her fizzle, Archie," said Bill. "Tell us, fur instance, how you ever got in tow with Mac an' Stewart. I reckon that yarn should be worth hearin'. Blamed if I can guess how you managed to rope in two sich bludgeon-fisted, case-hardened sinners. I think I should ha' been a bit skeert o' them if I'd been in your moccasins."

"All right!" returned Archie with a smile. "What do you say, Mac?"

"Fire away, laddie," grunted Mac, "an' don't forget to give a faithfu' account o' your first impressions o' Stewart. It'll maybe slacken the starch in his anatomy a bit."

"Be ju-deecious, Archie, be ju-deecious," im-

plored the other. "For ony sake keep back a' mention o' that disgracefu' exhibition o' Mac's, which hurt our dignity so sairly, an' be vera re-ticent concerning his maist terrible weaknesses, an' ——"

But here a protracted altercation took place, and when the wily Stewart, meekly submissive, had succeeded in insinuating certain other innocently uttered innuendoes in the course of his placable speech, the hour had grown late, so that Archie's wondrous tale had to be reserved for a future period.

When the day of rest arrived, which appropriately enough turned out to be a Sunday after all, Stewart was early astir making preparations for the banquet he had promised to provide. So rapt was he in his work that the camp became unconsciously interested to an exceeding extent in the anticipated results of his efforts. There is no place like North-West Canada for giving one an unromantic appetite for material foods, and the very thought of anything edible besides the inevitable beans and bacon diet made all as one in their desire to see Stewart's operations culminate in success. And such was their epicurean craving that all except the cook himself ate but sparingly of breakfast, and most willingly they lent their aid whenever called upon by the prime conspirator.

Archie very obligingly acted as chief assistant during the mysterious process of mixing the ingredients, and he chopped off the requisite amount of flour, soda, currants, oatmeal, rice, and other sundries as demanded of him, though he struggled with vague inward qualms when he was called upon to shovel in a few beans for the sole reason of making

the conglomerate, as Stewart said, "mair representative." At last the immature compound was forced into a state of cohesion by the use of an empty flour bag, which was tucked round it carefully, and tied at the top in a neat bow loop. And when the whole was placed in the one and only metal bucket the camp possessed — the largest legitimate cooking utensil had miserably failed to provide sufficient capacity — each man gazed on with mingled awe and respect.

By his own admission Stewart was skilled in all the arts pertaining to culinary excellence. He was the cook without question of the great Arctic circle, therefore the hungry and duly humble associates of the important man rejoiced, and were filled with the gladness of expectation as they strove to keep the stove roaring under its precious freight. Now the stove in use was little more than an iron box with a funnel leading therefrom, and a door at one end to allow of the necessary fuel being inserted, and the heat generated by ordinary combustion was divided over a fairly large surface of cold metal, so that unless the furnace was forced to its fullest activity the intense cold in the surrounding air was usually sufficient to chill the outside face of the contrivance even while a moderately fierce fire raged within. But all kinds of warmth-giving appliances behave similarly in regions where the thermometer falls well below the zero scale, and it was therefore not quite reasonable to expect that a large bucket with a flange at its base — which, being more or less battered, permitted a free access of air underneath — should heat up

rapidly and bring its contents to the desired boiling-point in the shortest space of time. Yet the anxious watchers nevertheless waxed unduly wroth, and hurled much opprobrium at the recalcitrant stove; yea, as the hours passed and the afternoon approached without visible reward for their labors, they even cast reflections on the cook's creation which thus so thoroughly refused to come to its consummation in a just time. Its author meanwhile lolled back on his couch smoking the pipe of peace, and ever and again eyeing his temporary aides-de-camp with a glance of serene satisfaction. "Keep her sizzlin', ye sinners," said he; "that pudden canna be ready for over an hour yet. You should have eaten mair breakfast, I'm thinkin'."

It came about that Archie, who had gone outside to look at the thermometer, was very considerably startled to see a strange uncouth sort of animal muzzling away at some sacks which had not been unloaded from one of the sleighs. Had Dave been about he would probably have discovered this marauder sooner, but Dave was then slumbering peacefully at Stewart's feet. "Why, it's a young bear," said Archie to himself. "It would be a shame to shoot the poor thing. I wonder if I could catch it." He made a move forward, and the bear ducked his sharp snout under the protecting bulwark of the sacks with ludicrous alacrity. When he appeared again he was at the opposite end of the sleigh, his two fore paws resting on the top of the load, his eyes blinking mischievously.

"He is a funny little beggar," laughed Archie, "and he seems tame enough too. I wonder if his

instinct will tell him what a rifle is?" He stepped back to the tent and secured his hunting Winchester. When he returned, the bear was ambling clumsily back into the forest, but immediately he heard Archie's feet crunch in the snow behind him he snuggled at the back of a tree, and kept quite still. Anon he raised himself on his hind legs and, clutching his fore paws around his shield and support, gazed at the man with the gun in a manner exceedingly comical, first from one side then from the other of his shelter; and when Archie raised his weapon threateningly the strange creature immediately drew back its head, and remained quiescent for quite a considerable time. Finally he peered out from the shade once more and yawned in the face of the stalker.

"Hullo!" quoth the lad; "this is evidently a humorous bear. I must try and catch him; he'd be rather good fun in the camp if he were tamed." Even as he spoke he got a glimpse of his intended quarry sidling cautiously away from him over the snow.

"I'm after you, my boy," murmured Archie, and after him he went, his moccasins sinking deep in the snowwreaths, which the bear seemed to shuffle over leaving scarce a mark; but despite his utmost efforts Bruin managed to keep well ahead, appearing and disappearing like a brown will-o'-the-wisp between and behind the forest timber. Nor was its course by any means a straight one; first to one side and then to the other it diverged, and the eager hunter behind was kept constantly slewing around. At last, however, a break in the forest was reached,

when the snow spread evenly and white for about two hundred yards before entering the gloom beyond. And on the edge of this clearing Archie stopped and looked about, and there was the bear just a few paces to the left and ahead of him, slouching over the snow at the most leisurely gait imaginable. Archie gave a chuckle of delight. "If I can catch up before he gets across among the trees again I'll have him safe enough," he muttered, and with renewed zest he bounded on. But before he had taken half a dozen steps he found himself plunging wildly in the deceptive snow plain, and endeavoring with all the skill at his command to keep his head above the surface. He had utterly neglected the fact that open spaces in the landscape, being exposed to every storm, would naturally collect a greater volume of snow than the sheltered paths of the forests.

When he ultimately reached the safety of the timber again the bear was no longer to be seen. It had made good its escape after all. Feeling rather disappointed at his failure, Archie shouldered his rifle and began his homeward march. He was just a shade hungry, and his mind dwelt longingly on the feast which would surely be ready when he got back. So he wandered on, rapt in his own thoughts, steering as he thought a straight course towards the camp.

He had been walking for some time when he suddenly halted and gazed around him enquiringly. "Why, I ought to have been there by this time," he exclaimed. "Surely I can't have mistaken my direction. Let me see; the river should lie east from me — but where is east?"

With considerable difficulty, and not a little fear lest he should find another lynx crouched among the branches, he scrambled up a tall tree and looked abroad. Nothing but trees rewarded his view, save where, in the dim distance, on either side the lofty ranges flanking the valley reared their misty heights. The sun had set, and darkness was already creeping over the great forest-clad expanse. Archie groaned in dismay, and, with a vague uneasiness stealing over him, got back to the snow and picked up his rifle in a feverish grip. The country at this point was gently undulating; it dipped to all points of the compass in turn. There was no apparent fall in the direction of the river. " I'm bushed! Hopelessly bushed! " exclaimed the lad aloud, " and " — he hastily threw open the breech of his rifle and gazed within — " only two cartridges," he muttered in helpless tones. " I remember now I fired off the rest yesterday at different times and forgot to load up again."

Resolutely he started off again, but now a great eerie darkness was gathering in the spaces between the trees, and several times he collided with the timber in his path. On, on, he hastened, and every moment the tension on his nerves increased, and his heart throbbed as if it would burst. And the cold was becoming more and more severe, as it invariably did in the evenings. It would reach ten degrees below zero before midnight. Already he was beginning to feel the numbness in his limbs which precedes frostbite. " I'll risk firing off one of these cartridges," he said decisively. " If I'm near the camp they will probably hear the report

and reply." He raised his rifle to his shoulder and pulled the trigger, and waited expectantly long after the heavy reverberation of the discharge had died away. But no answering signal was heard. "I must be a good bit away," he said hopelessly, "and it's really no use my wandering aimlessly about any longer. But I'm not going to howl about it. I must just prepare to spend the night where I am. In the morning, if I'm alive, I'll be able to make a better shape at it."

He fumbled in the pocket of his thick Mackinaw coat and drew forth a box of matches. "It's lucky I have these," he murmured, almost cheerfully. "Now I can make a fire and keep these blessed prowlers away, unless — " A long-drawn-out howl issued from the gloom near by, and shivered piercingly into the night. It was at once answered from different parts of the forest, and for about a minute, without cessation, there reigned a regular inferno of sound. "Unless," continued Archie, striking a match, "unless they're very hungry."

The flickering flame cast its feeble light over the snow, and shone on some dead branches lying near; it also shone on the tracks his moccasined feet had made. Then the burnt stump fell from his fingers, and he stood upright, bitterly abusing himself. "The tracks," he groaned, "would have led me back at the start if I hadn't been so confoundedly sure of myself, and even if I had begun to follow them back, instead of putting off time climbing the tree, I could have been at the camp long before this. Oh, how stupidly one behaves when the nerve gives way! But — but —— "

A new idea seemed to strike him; he felt the matches in the box with his ungloved fingers and tried to estimate their number. "They might do," he mused aloud. "I don't know how far I have come altogether, but I may as well make a try anyhow."

He lit another match, and, holding it low, and protecting the guttering spark in the hollow of his one free hand, darted back as he had come, slipping and stumbling in his haste to cover as much of his old trail as possible before the light failed him. Again and again he followed this method of procedure, and one by one the matches dwindled low in the box. When only two remained he stopped and placed them carefully away in his pocket. "I'll try and get along by feeling for the markings," he muttered. "I'll keep these two for my fire at the last." Then on hands and knees he groped wearily onwards, guided by the sense of touch alone where his moccasins had but lightly marked the snow.

Five minutes passed in this way; it seemed an eternity; and the ominous voicings of his savage neighbors sounded on every side. Then with a shivering cry he floundered down in the selfsame depths that had obstructed his progress earlier in the day. Still gripping tightly to his rifle he manœuvred desperately from out the chilly drifts, and then — he was almost about to return on the track he twice had traced already. But no. Archie's senses were yet pretty keen despite his continued muttered assertions to the contrary. "It's the left-hand trail going back," he considered. "Now

I must find that left-hand trail." And after much striving and vain groping he found it.

Slowly, slowly, he writhed his way over the snow. Another five minutes passed, and he halted perplexed. "I could almost swear that I am doubling back again," he exclaimed. "And yet — and yet," he continued, his hand patting a wide and deep depression in the unseen trail, "the markings are heavy enough. Surely I haven't diverged off on some big animal's track." The thought appalled him, and his teeth clenched tight on his lip as he strove to repress the cry that seemed to well upwards from his heart. Wearily he felt for the match-box in his pocket. "I'll chance it," said he grimly. "If it is my own moccasin track I can't be far from camp; if it is not, then I'd better look around for a comfortable tree." The match flamed and spluttered out, and still Archie remained motionless, his eyes fixed blankly on the darkened snow where the light had glimmered so feebly, for it was not the imprint of a moccasin he had seen, but the wide, sprawling, fresh track of a full-grown bear.

"I'd better find my camping tree in a hurry," he said, pulling himself together. "My remaining match may give me a fire, if I can find any withered branches about, and my last cartridge will do for anything on four feet that may pay me a visit."

Boom! A deafening report rang out from the timber close at hand. Boom! Again the thunderous discharge crashed through the still air. The benighted bear-hunter could scarce restrain a cheer. "That is Mac's gun," he cried in wild

delight. "The camp must be quite near after all."

Gone at once was his despairing weariness; gone were all his gloomy forebodings. Regardless now of the trail he had been so painfully following, he turned off at a tangent and dashed recklessly in the direction whence the life-giving alarms had come. And as he ran, the ponderous echoes of the mighty firearm burst out afresh, guiding him unerringly towards the safety he had sought so long; then the whiplike crack of the Captain's repeater, and the lashing roar of Bill's .44 calibre Express were added to the din, as the whole artillery of the camp came into action.

Pausing a moment in his mad rush, Archie raised his rifle and exploded a solitary answering signal. Thus was his last cartridge spent, and in the breathless silence that followed close after the rolling echoes had died away, he broke through into a firelit zone, where four men stood with weapons upraised, preparing for another volley.

"Thank heaven, you've got back all right," spoke Mac fervently, grounding his breechloader with an air of relief. "We didn't know where you had gone, an' were gettin' a bit anxious."

"The fact is, young man," growled Bill, "we suspicioned a grisly or a silver-tip b'ar had swallowed you. You were taking mighty big risks trampin' around the menagerie arter sundown."

"Well, well," said the Captain hurriedly, "Archie knows how to take care of himself. It's the darkness coming on so early in the afternoon that makes things awkward for steering back, that's all."

" If you would stop your speechifying an' let the laddie get in beside the stove it would be mair sensible," quoth Stewart. " Come awa' in, Archie, an' stew the icicles off your face. You've got back in guid time, for the pudden is just about ready."

Thankfully the youth seated himself near the glowing furnace, and gave himself up to a host of reflections. His experiences of the last hour were yet too severe upon him to bear repetition, though he had a fairly shrewd idea that his companions were in no way deceived by his silence. But the great event of the day was approaching, and the stir attendant on the welcome knowledge made speech on any other topic seem almost incongruous, and soon Archie found himself, like the rest, taking an active interest in the high cook's movements.

" It should be weel cooked now, I'm thinkin'," remarked that important personage, peering into the bubbling depths of the bucket; " or," he continued, smiling blandly round on the company, " do you recommend that I should allow it another hour? "

" Not a blessed fraction o' a minute," howled Bill.

Whereupon, Stewart, with the aid of his bowie knife, gingerly fished the origin of disturbance to the surface of the water, and dexterously landed it on a waiting plate. Amid an awed silence he undid the wrappings, and lo! a sodden, solid, spherical mass was brought to view and hailed with loud, ironical cheers.

" Now, I ask a fair question," spake the cook, gazing at the monstrosity tenderly; " did you ever see a pudden like that? "

And a blend of sad voices answered him: "No, never!"

Then came a struggle, in which the wondrous pudding played central figure. Right stoutly it resisted the blandishments of the enemy, but strength ultimately prevailed, and in triumph the victors carried off their portions.

Now, despite all prognostications of evil omen, Stewart's pudding turned out to be a great success; at least all ate of it so freely that in a short space nothing was left save some disintegrated pieces, which were at once claimed by Dave as his just and lawful due. The feast had been a truly regal one, and under its benign influence a profound feeling of contentment soon pervaded the tent, and Stewart was the recipient of much adulatory tribute. Then Archie felt moved to relate the episode of the bear, and when he had finished, the faces of his audience were a study.

"You must have been a good way off the track," said Mac, "for we didn't hear your first shot."

"But, by James!" broke in the Captain, "you ought to be thankful you didn't catch up with that bear, Archie. From your description he must have been a sloth bear, and as like as not he was a full-grown one at that. I know their babyish tricks well, but I'd rather run against a grisly any day than a sloth."

"Kerect, Captain," grunted Bill. "There ain't no young b'ars about at this time o' year, an' — Hang it, I don't feel very joyful at this blessed minute. I reckon I'm goin' to hand in my checks. Blow me! I am bad!"

Vainly Mac tried to comfort him. "It's maybe a passin' spasm," said he.

"It's nae spasm," murmured Stewart gently. "It's pudden, that's what it is. P-U-D-D-E-N, pudden."

"I guess it's fixed me too, boys," muttered the Captain, turning uneasily on his seat. "I think — I think I'll go to bed."

Then Archie was conscious of Stewart's accusing eyes fixed on him, and a soothing voice spake: "Are you no' feelin' vera weel, Archie?"

"Oh yes, I'm all right!" answered the lad with a laugh.

"Are you quite sure you dinna feel a wee bit squeamish?" persisted the questioner plaintively.

"Certain," returned Archie promptly, though in truth he was beginning to wish that he had had less of the deadly pudding.

"Try the dog," advised Mac grimly. Dave was tucked up near the stove, seemingly afflicted with bad dreams, and he paid no heed to Stewart's enticing whisper. Then a hoarse voice came from the corner where Bill had rolled himself in his blankets: "After all, Archie, I reckon you might have had the best o' it out in the forest." Silently Archie crawled away to rest, and a little later, Mac, having heaped bitter disparagement on the gloating author of the "pudden" copied his example. Then Stewart stoked up the stove, blew out the candle, and, before retiring amongst the fallen, soliloquized thusly: "There's nae man can cook anything like me — especially puddens."

CHAPTER IX

DAWSON CITY

DAWSON CITY, the Golden Capital of the North was, in the year of the great rush, a very embyro city indeed.

Its population, housed in a scattered array of log huts, consisted of about two dozen Canadian and American miners, who had been in the vicinity at the start of the boom, and about a hundred men of mixed nationality, who had entered the country by way of St. Michaels, in the Behring Strait, before the Yukon's waters had frozen over.

This route offered comparatively few obstructions to progress, though in the feverish excitement of the early days, the fact was not very widely known, and the shorter trail, via the Chilcoot, consequently attracted the greater number of enthusiastic adventurers, who found in the notorious pass such a sudden and sad blow to their cherished hopes. And strangely enough, while an eager throng waited impatiently at the gateway of the "promised land," the inhabitants of Dawson were beginning to wonder how they could get out of their envied position. In nearly every case a sufficient food supply to last until the spring had not been brought, all impedimenta having been reduced to the lowest

estimate, to facilitate travel, and no sooner had the haven of desire been reached that it was made clear that a shortage of the bare necessities of life was imminent.

So it happened that the majority of the newcomers, after pegging out their claims on the various gold-bearing creeks in the neighborhood, felt in no mood to work them to any extent, and quickly they returned to the shelter of Dawson and the company of their fellows, and waited the advent of the capitalist, hoping strongly that their stores would last out until Nature released her grasp on the river and made such a contingency possible.

Meanwhile the natural inhabitants of the valley, the Thron-Diuck Indians, who had previously made their houses in a little village adjacent to the more pretentious settlement of the whites, removed themselves and their worldly belongings farther up the Klondike River. Their chief reasoned out the position logically: where the white man was successful and had plenty of food he was the very best of company, but where the white man starved and indulged over largely in "firewater," why then, he was a dangerous neighbor for the untutored children of the wild.

Now it was odd that the exodus of the red man took place immediately after the arrival of the contingent from civilization, and yet it was not altogether inexplicable to the few pioneers who had first peopled the district, for in truth the newcomers were a desperate-looking lot. It was they who instigated the custom of carrying firearms exposed on the person; it was they — tenderfeet

from the cities for the most part, yet with a fair sprinkling of the roughs and toughs of America and Europe — who were at the bottom of nearly all disturbances; and because they had little knowledge of the bloodthirsty weapons they so conspicuously displayed, they were the more dangerous as enemies to the community at large. A man who knows that a hasty touch of the trigger may kill or maim his fellow creature, and perchance bring sudden retribution upon himself, is usually unwilling to make sport of his armory of offence and defence, but the tenderfoot, unversed in the unwritten laws of remote mining camps, almost invariably runs amuck when he finds himself free and beyond control of the law. It was the transplanted desperado of the cities, not the genuine miner, who proved the greatest danger during the early days of Dawson. The rough, horny-handed knight of the pick and shovel might use language terse and emphatic without ever dreaming of going further, but the tenderfoot, because of his nervous fear, would probably draw his revolver and shoot under the same circumstances.

And so the tension grew to such an extent that men in the passing eyed one another askance, with hand on revolver stock, and went on their way mindful and even anticipatory of danger from their chance associates.

King James the Second, Chief of the Thron-Diucks, was therefore wise to evacuate the winter residence of his forefathers when he did. Already the Indians' stock of salmon had suffered from the depredating raids of the more unruly whites. What

would be the result when advancing winter quickened the hunger of the paleface? He foresaw a troublous future, in which he and his young braves figured conspicuously, and, being a knowing chief, and mindful of the welfare of his people, he uncomplainingly moved with all his hosts back into the unknown upper reaches of the Klondike.

Then followed a period of dread suspense; the half frenzied gold seekers had still a steadfast belief that some relief expedition would reach them before their stores came to an end, and as a last chance they calculated they could retreat in safety to St. Michaels before the Yukon became frozen.

Too late was the knowledge forced upon them that the iron grip of an Arctic winter was already upon the country. The Yukon, unknown to them, had been gradually freezing from its source northwards, and those who expected, and most naturally, that the icefield would close in from the north were cruelly mistaken; they had neglected the fact that the extreme altitude of the upper Yukon valley more than recompensed to the elements for the few degrees of difference in latitude between the Chilcoot Pass and the little Indian village on the Klondike.

And so in the far-distant northern outpost the chill October blasts were hushed and the deadly quiet of a November frost reigned supreme. Not a sound was to be heard but the crackling ripple of the ice-bearing flood as the miniature floes dashed one against another, and soon the congested state of the river aroused a wild alarm. "Where was the ice coming from?" "Was the Yukon indeed

freezing from the south?" "Why should the ice appear in detached portions?" These were some of the questions asked by the residents of Dawson, but no satisfactory reply was forthcoming; not one among them could speak from a previous knowledge.

As a matter of fact the floes were but fragments of the icefield on Lake Labarge, broken off by the force of the current at its northern extremity. And one morning those floating fragments appeared as a sea of jagged crystal boulders, immovable, solid, welded together in one mighty mass. The Yukon had entered upon its long term of imprisonment to the icy monarch. Its rushing waters were stilled for long months to come. Dawson was left to its fate.

It was about a week after this that a wonderful disturbance broke out somewhere near the Miners' Saloon in the main thoroughfare. The white, frosted street, but a moment before deserted and desolate, at once became thronged with people, mostly emanating from the saloon, and voices loud and angry rose in deafening clamor.

"Shoot him!" String him up!" "We'll have no miserable thief in this crowd!"

These and sundry similar exclamations filled the air.

"It warn't me. I didn't take anything," howled a weird-looking specimen of humanity who was being rudely jostled in the centre of the group. "It warn't me, I ——"

"Oh, cut it short!" interrupted a tall and heavy-built individual, who seemed to be taking a leading

part in the proceedings. "We won't miss you, I guess, an' ——"

"Give him a fair trial," bellowed a stalwart miner on the outskirts of the crowd. "Let the poor devil have a show for his life."

The self-constituted judge and jury combined glared at the speaker. "It'll be your funeral next, Broncho Jim, if you don't look out," said he grimly. "The boys hev decided that this hyer galoot has to die, an' he may as well hitch on to that fact right away. Isn't that kerect, boys?" A long, low murmur, which might have meant anything, answered him. Then he went on: "So I vote he be shot instanter."

The condemned man, now seeing the futility of protest, made no further effort in his own favor, but the former interrupter howled forth again: "Jest you hold your mule team for a jiff, ye gory-hearted son o' a gun, till I round up the boys outside. I reckon it ain't fair ——"

"Keep your head shut, Broncho Jim, or you'll find a dose o' lead will interfere with the state o' your health mighty sudden. You know my reputation, boys. Does any other fool want to run up against me?"

Then Broncho Jim made a final appeal to the assembly. "Blow ye, ye howlin' tenderfeet! will ye let that murderin' cuss what calls himself a sheriff do as he likes? What right has he to slaughter an Amurican citizen without a trial?"

Only the intervening crowd saved him from disaster after this speech, for the so-called sheriff had drawn his revolver, though he dared not shoot

over the heads of his supporters. Clearly the frequenters of the saloon were going to have things very much their own way, for the more respectable members of the camp had not yet put in an appearance. Having satisfied himself that his power was still in the ascendant, the leader of the mob turned a scowling face upon the shivering prisoner, on whose face already a new dignity had come, the dignity of one about to die.

"Now, ye cantankerous galoot, I don't reckon you'll find much sympathy in this hyer crowd o' law-abiding citizens. You'll get a quarter o' an hour exactly to say your prayers." He turned aside with a brutal laugh.

The prospective victim of lynch law remained motionless as a statue.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon. The fine frost was descending in glittering spangles. It covered the caps of the multitude, and clung to the long hair of the prisoner, giving him a patriarchal aspect. The dulling light of the brief day shone on the sombre rifle barrels of the firing party. A hush fell over the assembly. Then faintly through the air came the subdued baying of a dog.

"By the great Arctic Circle, there's a couple o' sleds comin' in from the south!" roared someone. "I reckon it must be a Government outfit. Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"You may save your wind," growled the Sheriff. "Two sleds won't carry much, an' I reckon it will only be a mail-carrier's caravan. Nothing else could come down that trail."

Several figures now showed up through the haze,

and about half a mile off. They seemed to be in two distinct groups, and a heavily laden sleigh tugged behind each party. On, on, they came, never halting, never slacking their pace; slow, yet dogged and sure was their progress. As they drew nearer it could be seen that a slim, bemuffled figure walked well ahead to mark the trail, and his lead the first sleigh traced with great precision, pulled by two men and a dog, the dog occupying a central position between them. Immediately behind came a somewhat lighter weighted conveyance, also with two grim figures at its head, but with no dog assisting. Nearer and nearer they drew, the dog growling hoarsely as he struggled in the traces but the men making never a sound. In grim silence and with bowed heads they bent to their labors, nor did the youth in advance ever once look back. Apparently they must have been long on the trail to move with such clock-like regularity. From head to foot each member of the party was draped in a glittering mantle of white. Now they were within a hundred yards, now fifty, then a cry of wonder broke from the onlookers, for as the toilworn travellers pressed up the slight slope of the Yukon bank they presented an appearance grim and terrible. Their clothing, where it was visible, clung in tatters to their bodies, their moccasins were cut into strips, splinters of ice adhered here and there upon their persons, and their visages were framed in clustering icicles, all showing in silent language how severe had been the fight with the elements, how strenuous the struggle through the blown ice pyramids. Even the man who waited in peril of his life turned eagerly towards

the newcomers, but in his glance there was more of entreaty than curiosity.

They drew up a few yards from the crowd, the young man in advance grounding his rifle with a sigh of satisfaction, while the others, releasing themselves from their sleighs, came forward in leisurely fashion, gingerly rubbing their features free from clinging ice as they did so.

"Say, strangers," spoke the Sheriff, "have you come far?"

"From the coast," answered the youth quietly.

"From the coast? Over the ice?" cried a dozen voices at once.

"Over the ice from White Horse," came the reply. "There are over two hundred more waiting at the pass, but they can't come along till spring."

"Oh, you ain't a relief expedition, then?" growled the interrogator.

"There's not much relief about that trail," grunted one of the sleigh pullers, who was none other than Mac, despite his frosty disguise.

"Relief!" howled his near companion. "My man, if you want to be funny, try it on the dog."

"Then what have you come here for?" snarled someone in the crowd.

Mac eyed the gathering of wild-looking men with a new interest, and noted the poor unfortunate in their midst.

"I shouldn't like to admit that we have come for the good o' our health," he murmured thoughtfully, turning back towards the sleigh.

"Go on with the funeral, boys," rasped the Sheriff. "Time's up!"

Once more Broncho Jim roused himself; looking towards the weary travellers he hurled forth a mighty shout.

"I protest! Will ye stand by, boys, an' see this gang shoot a man afore your eyes? By the Land o' Canaan, if only wan or two o' my mates were here ——"

Mac wheeled around suddenly, and at once the Captain and Bill, who had not yet spoken, strode forward.

"What has the poor fellow done that you should want to kill him?" demanded Mac calmly, turning a keen glance on the Sheriff.

"Because he's a thief, siree. Because he stole a sack o' flour, which is a sight more precious than gold dust in this hyer camp. Now boys," turning to his satellites, "go on with the circus."

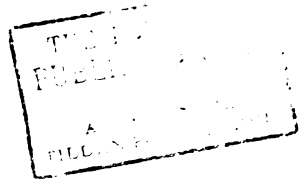
"Steady a bit, lads," cried Mac. "Surely you wouldn't shoot a man for the sake o' a sack o' flour. I'm thinkin' that is a vera irregular sort o' justice. Are you all so entirely without sin that you can sit in judgment on a starving man?"

"I am at your elbow, Mac," panted Stewart; "dinna let them murder the puir creature."

"Archie," continued Mac, "are you willin' that we should buy a man's life for a sack o' flour?"

The youth, who stood near, uttered not a word, but went back to the first sleigh, undid one of the sacks thereon, and cast it in the snow in front of the crowd. But though the action was greeted with a murmur of approval, the ringleader of the accusers had no intention of being thus deprived of his amusement.

"HE FOUND HIMSELF LOOKING INTO THE BARREL OF BILL'S DEADLY COLT REVOLVER"



" I reckon the law can't go back on its decision," he drawled.

" I reckon you're a liar! " shouted Kentucky Bill impetuously. " Let the man go free, or by the Stars an' Stripes thar'll be more than wan funeral around here purty slick."

" I demand a fair and proper trial for the prisoner." It was the Captain who now spoke, but the Sheriff was evidently too upset by the Kentuckian's words to grasp the fact that now quite a goodly number of those present were against him.

" You don't know what you have run up against, my bantam," he said, glaring at Bill, his right hand slowly moving round to the vicinity of his hip pocket. " Now, the boys here could tell you that I've killed seven better men than you afore this, an —— "

He stopped suddenly, for he found himself looking into the barrel of Bill's deadly Colt revolver.

" I guess you've made a little mistake this time," murmured the individual behind the gun. " I ain't taking any chances o' being the eighth. Throw up your hands you white-livered skunk, or I'll drill a hole through you quicker 'n lightning."

The Sheriff's hands went up obediently, and a ghastly grin appeared on his pallid features.

" Don't shoot, pardner," he faltered whiningly.

" Hoorah! " yelled Broncho Jim. " Now we see what the powerful speaker is made o'. What do you think o' your mighty Sheriff now, boys? "

" I allus reckoned we had no call to shoot the man anyhow," muttered one nervous-looking creature who had just previously been loud in support of his chief.

" Let the critter go," growled several voices at once. " He ain't worth scrimmaging about."

Finding himself temporarily released from custody, the intended victim of lynch law was not slow to avail himself of the chance of escape that offered. Dazed and stumbling he made his way through the encircling band, pausing opposite his rescuers to murmur a feeble: " Thank you, strangers."

" Here, my lad, take the sack o' flour," said Mac. " I think you have more need o' it than most o' us. There now, don't bother saying thanks again. Get out while you have the chance." And the freed man, with the load on his shoulder, broke into a staggering run and quickly vanished from sight.

All this time Bill's revolver covered the cowering coward before him, nor did it seem now that anyone was anxious to take the humbled ruffian's part. But an unexpected diversion occurred to ease the strain of the situation. Down the Klondike River about half a score of men, armed with rifles, came rushing, and as they approached their lips breathed forth many forceful imprecations.

" The boys have come at last," roared Broncho in high glee. " Now, Sheriff, I reckon you'll have a mighty tight job explaining this little racket."

Before the reinforcement came, however, the unruly gang had melted entirely away, and the new arrivals found only Archie and his four companions, Broncho Jim, and the Sheriff on the scene of strife, and the last named was still taking an unsatisfactory view of things through the medium of the dull tube of Bill's revolver.

" What's the matter now, Broncho? " cried the

foremost of the party. "Have they been at it again?"

"They tried their best to hustle a half-starved critter into etarnity for stealing," answered Broncho. "Bonanza Ted missed a sack o' flour, an' he reckoned the other chap took it. Of course the big-jawed Sheriff chipped in, an' I guess thar would ha' been a funeral sartin if them here Father Christmases wi' the sleds hadn't rolled along in time. You may let up wi' the gun, pardner," turning to Kentucky Bill; "there ain't any fight left in the coyote."

"Blow me," grunted Bill, lowering his weapon, "I thought he was a howlin' tornado by the way he wagged his tongue."

Freed from his prevailing fear that Bill's finger might press over heavily on the trigger of his threatening revolver, the self-styled sheriff quickly assumed a truculent demeanor.

"You are the first man that has ever got the drop on me," he hissed, "an' I reckon you won't live long, to brag about it. I've planted seven ——"

"Get out you sweep!" roared Broncho.

"Yes, git out, an' be quick about it," added the leader of the relieving force, "an' I guess we'll put it to the vote mighty sudden whether you, as representing the crooks o' the camp, are going to boss the show, or whether the honest miners are likely to have a say. Hang me if I know what you an' your kind came here for at all, though I have a suspicion it warn't to dig for gold if you could get it in an easier way."

The humbled fire-eater clearly did not feel com-

fortable under the contemptuous glances of those around. His brave eloquence failed him now that his friends were not near. His bluster could be of no avail in this instance. Muttering curses, he turned and walked hastily away.

Then the men whose coming had been so eagerly desired by Broncho clustered round the travelworn little band that had so successfully intervened to prevent an inhuman abuse of mining-camp law, and heartily they congratulated them on their safe passage of the long trail.

" We didn't reckon anyone would have the nerve to tackle such a journey at this time o' year," cried the man who had done most of the speaking, " an' we did our best to keep anyone from trying too. Didn't you meet Silver Water, the mail carrier, somewhere near the pass? Why, that looks like his dog you've got.

" He gave it to me," said Archie quietly.

Then Mac started to explain as much as he thought fit of the incidents attendant on their journey from Dyea.

He told of Silver Water's accident, of the wipe out at Sheep Camp, and of the destruction of the hastily engineered railway over the pass. He gave a rough sketch of their travel from Linderman to White Horse, where they got frozen in, and dwelt briefly on the long sleigh trip from that point.

" From White Horse to Pelly River," he concluded, " was bad, but from the Pelly on here the trail was simply terrible. At Stewart River the ice was piled in places about fifty feet high. But," and he looked grimly round at his companions, " it

takes a good deal to stop this little caravan when it makes up its mind to go on."

Mac's audience had listened eagerly to his narrative, and now they broke in with all sorts of comments and inquiries.

"Was it possible to force the back trail, going light?"

"Had anyone of the party noted the various directions and landmarks carefully?"

"Would the snow on the upper reaches of the river have filled the valley and covered the trees?"

"'Pears to me you're mighty anxious 'bout that back trail," growled Bill. "S'pose you sling around some information concarning the gold pockets in this hyer district. We've got a sort o' tender interest in that direction."

"You don't seem to ketch on, boys," put in Broncho Jim. "This little outfit ain't askin' for knowledge for the sake o' amoosement. You see, we've been up here since the summer, an' our stores are gettin', waal, a bit low, I reckon. We expected them chaps who came up the river from St. Michaels to have a fair-sized stock, but the blessed idjuts came along as light as they could, an' I'm bothered if I see how the camp is going to last out through the winter."

"But you could all have gone out before the freeze up, couldn't you?" said Archie.

"Nary time; we had to wait an' hang on to our ground when the tenderfeet bumped in on us, and them galoots have been blowin' 'bout relief expeditions being sent in, an' every other sort o' tomfool story, an ——"

" You may as well ease off on the relief expedition," said the Captain. " The people outside are too precious anxious to get into Dawson to worry about those who are already in. Then, again, no heavy outfit could tackle that trail. I know what I'm talking about. You'll get no relief expedition in here before the summer."

" Oh, Moses," groaned one of the men, " that means anything 'bout six months of a wait, an' I'll be gol' dashed if there's any galoot's got more'n three months' grub altogether."

" Well, boys, that brings us back to these questions about the Dyea trail," urged the first speaker. " The point is, can we, or can we not, force down to the coast over the Chilcoot if our stores won't last out."

" Only the strongest among you would dare face it," said the Captain. " When the thermometer slides down under forty below, Heaven knows what the trail will be like. You've got to remember that we skidded in on the new ice, and we found it hard enough travelling."

" Archie's got a note o' our journey in his book," murmured Mac thoughtfully; " maybe he could help you most."

" I know the trail," spoke the lad quietly, " but, as the Captain says, it may grow much more difficult as the winter advances."

" An', if we have to call a roll up, will you help us? " asked one of the miners anxiously.

" I'll do everything I can," answered Archie, " and anyhow — we've only got four months' provisions ourselves — that is, less the sack of flour we gave away."

"Which was worth 'bout two hundred dollars," muttered Broncho.

"Twa hunner dollars! A sack o' floor worth twa hunner dollars!" howled Stewart, who had up to this point been taking but a passing interest in the proceedings. "My man, ye'll be better to speak mair moderately, or we'll want to sell you some——"

"I'm a buyer at that figure," answered Broncho quickly.

"And me!"

"And me!" came several voices.

"I reckon that sizes up your position quicker than all your talkie-talkie," quoth Bill, "but I guess I speak for this hyer party o' pilgrims when I say that though we ain't sellers we'll see no man starve, even if we've got to tackle half-rations ourselves."

"Will any guid Samaritan show us the best place to camp," plaintively sung out Stewart. "The dog's tired, an' Mac's tired, an' the Captain's tired, everybody's tired, an' — an' I'm beginning to feel a wee bit weary masel'."

"Blow me for a hard-hearted galoot!" exclaimed Broncho. "I had clean disremembered 'bout you just comin' off the trail. Come over to my hut, boys. You kin hitch your tent somewhere handy alongside. May I be choked wi' a nugget if I don't give you an invite to tea, even if I have to do a perish for it afterwards. Come along, boys, Broncho Jim o' Eldorado Creek ain't going to forget that he's an Amurican citizen."

"All right, Broncho," said the leader of the miners, "you look after the strangers, an' I guess

I'll roll along to-night sometime, an' have a yarn, an', say boys, seems to me I forgot to mention that we are etarnally obliged to you for holding up the Sheriff."

"That was a pleasure, pard," laughed Bill.

"It would gie me mair pleasure to knock him doon," grumbled Stewart, seizing his sleigh rope. "Gee up, Dave, ye dinna need to pretend you're hungry, for it's only a fortnight ago since ye made a beast o' yoursel' eatin' so much o' my bonnie pudden. Gee up, an' dinna look so savage like!"

With a creak and a groan the sledge jerked on once more, but soon they drew up beside Broncho Jim's hut, which was set back among the timber, a little way from the township. Within ten minutes the tent was rigged up and all made comfortable within, and meanwhile Broncho, in his adjacent dwelling, was dutifully melting a quantity of snow in the coffeepot on the stove in order to provide refreshment for his visitors. He had got the length of being ready to add the coffee when Stewart entered with an armful of various provisions.

"Wi' floor at twa hunner dollars a sack, it would be barefaced robbery for us to swallow your stores, Broncho, my man," said he. "Forbye, I'm especially hungry, an' — an' ——"

Broncho held out his paw. "Put it there, pard," said he. "You're a white man. Blowed if I've got anything more than flour and coffee in the hull blessed outfit, an' I'm perishing for a change."

"We'll cook the dinner together," suggested Stewart.

That night quite a sociable evening was spent in

Broncho Jim's shanty. The joint efforts of the cooks had resulted in quite an unusually appetizing repast being provided, to which all did ample justice; nor was Dave neglected, for quite a goodly share of the generous provender fell to his portion.

"Talkin' 'bout dogs," Broncho remarked, squatting down on a log conveniently near the stove and preparing to fill his pipe; "perhaps you don't happen to know that that thar dog o' yours is wan of the best-known animiles between this an' the Behring Straits. He is the boss fighter in these parts, though you mightn't think it, for he looks such a gentle an' peaceable sort o' brute."

"We know he can fight all right," said Archie, rising from his comfortable quarters in Broncho's bunk, and pointing out the scarce-healed scars on Dave's body, which the lynx had made.

Broncho grunted: "Yep, I savvy. Lynx did ye say? Waal, that ain't the biggest skirmish he's been in. No, siree, not by a jugful. Say, is he your dog?"

"Yes," answered Archie, "Silver Water gave him to me at Sheep Camp, and I wouldn't part with him for anything."

Broncho looked disappointed.

"Oh, wouldn't you?" he questioned. "Now look-a-here, young feller, I'll give you three hundred dollars in solid gold nuggets for that animile, right now, and I promise I'll be good to him. No? Then I'll make it four hundred ——"

Archie silently shook his head. "I cannot part with him," he murmured; "it was an Indian's gift, and he may come back to reclaim it."

" Furthermore, Broncho, my lad," spoke Mac, " though I don't own a gold mine just at present, I would give four hundred dollars myself to keep Dave in our own company."

Broncho smiled good-naturedly. " Ah well," said he, " thar ain't no harm done, but, now that I've got my memory on the razzle, I don't mind telling you a yarn 'bout that dog."

Mac and Stewart at once gazed suspiciously at the speaker, but Broncho's whole attention now seemed centred on the subject of conversation.

" Well, fire away! " directed Mac half-reluctantly, " but don't forget we want a good deal o' information from you this night —— "

" Hang me if I hadn't disremembered again! " cried Broncho. " I 'pologize, boys. You see, gold don't tickle me worth a cent now. I've got the confounded stuff, but I ain't got enough to eat, an' my mem'ry keeps driftin' away."

" S'pose you let it drift down to the dog," suggested Bill lightly.

" No, boys, I reckon I'd better slow up on the dog. The story would take too much time, I guess, an' you'll likely hear of it purty often if you are to be around these parts long. But since you ain't primed up wi' any knowledge 'bout the animile, I kin tell you he belonged to an old Hudson Bay trapper — Dick Roper was his handle — who made a stiff journey 'cross the divide from the Mackenzie last year. Somehow or other Dick ran short o' grub, an' the wolves came along; but he managed to keep 'em off with his rifle until he struck the headwaters o' the Klondike, somewhere back in the mountains; then

he must ha' caved in wi' starvation. Anyways, Silver Water picked up his tracks when he was out huntin' a big moose deer, an' followed them to Dick's last camp. Dick was nigh pegging out when he got thar, and his dog — that dog o' yours — was standing guard."

Broncho paused.

"A faithful animal, a faithful friend, even as Silver Water said," put in Mac quietly.

"A faithful animile!" exclaimed Broncho. "Why, pardner, that warn't all, for round about old Dick's camp, within a few feet o' whar he war lyin', thar was over a dozen dead coyotes, showin' nothin' but the marks o' Dave's teeth on their carcasses. An' that ain't the whole story neither. The young Injun brought the trapper into Fort Yukon, but poor old Dick was too far gone to live. He went out on the lone trail a few days arter; but before he shuffled off he told some yarns 'bout that thar dog that would make your hair curl. He gave the dog to Silver Water, an' when the Injun gave him away to you, he must ha' felt purty much loaded up wi' gratitood I kin tell you."

Just then the door of the hut was kicked open, and half a dozen of Broncho's friends entered, among them being the man who headed the miners earlier in the afternoon. This individual, Archie now noticed, was of an exceptionally strong and wiry build, and there was an air of decision on his deeply-lined face that at once betokened the man of unflinching purpose.

Broncho introduced him with a wave of his hand.

"Alf Macintosh of Eldorado Creek," said he; "as

for the other galoots, they come from the same nuggety quarter. We're all Eldorado men here 'ceptin' Handsome Harry over there, who has his pegs on Bonanza."

Mac rose to his feet to do the honors of his party.

"We can't lay claim to much in the way o' euphonious titles — " he began.

"Good Mac," chuckled Stewart; "a maist splendiferous word that."

"But," continued Mac, ignoring the interruption, "I shouldn't wonder if we manage to annex one or two auriferous sort o' adjectives before we leave the country —— "

"An' there ain't no reason why ye shouldn't, I reckon," cried Broncho, "though I'm bothered if a man can eat gold. I'd rather be called Floury Jim, or somethin' o' that sort. 'Pears to me it would sound more comfortable."

"Well, boys," said Macintosh, "I'm here to give you any information you want. I know the creeks within fifteen miles round about, though I must say thar ain't much showing away from the main claims, an' bottom is too deep for you to chance sinking until the summer anyhow. You'd best camp right here an' wait until the ground thaws a bit."

But this suggestion Mac would not entertain.

"We must work while the stores last," he said decisively. "What is the depth o' bedrock on Eldorado or Bonanza? "

"About twenty feet," answered Macintosh, "an' you couldn't sink a shaft that depth between this an' next summer. The ground is hard as iron, an' every inch has to be burned out."

"Has no prospecting been done beyond fifteen miles from here?" asked Archie.

"No, sir. You see we found the main workings as they are at present, and all the tenderfeet just slap-banged alongside o' us. We didn't need to go prospectin' farther, an' they didn't know enough to do it. Further, they ain't sinking any shafts, they're sitting tight waiting for the boom. Every bit o gold that has come out'n the Klondike has come out'n three or four potholes that Broncho an' myself an' our mates sank in the summer."

"In that case what caused the rush?" asked the Captain.

"Rush? Blowed if I know, unless some of Soapy Sam's gang got it up for some purpose."

"Soapy Sam!" exclaimed Archie. "Was he here? Does he know this country?"

"Well, I reckon he ought to be as well acquaint with this district as most people, an' mebbe a mighty sight better. Do you know Soapy, my lad?"

"Well, yes, that is, I've seen him," said Archie in some confusion.

"Soapy is a man Archie has good reason for remembering," added Mac significantly; "and I shall hope to meet him some o' these days."

Broncho whistled aloud, and Macintosh of Eldorado looked perplexed. As for Bill and the Captain, they had previously been told a good deal about the incident of the stolen process, but their surprise was nevertheless keen to learn that the suspected thief was a well-known character even in the Klondike regions.

"Surely Soapy isn't the man to dig for gold!"

mused the Captain. " I always thought he preferred to get it by an easier plan than that."

" An' no more he does exactly dig for gold," commented Macintosh with a laugh; " he gets others to do it for him. But the fact is the same slippery individual is mightily mixed up in things around these here quarters, an' I may as well tell you all about it, then you will understand better why we don't know too much about the upper reaches o' the Klondike.

" Before I begin, though, I kin give you a sure tip that Soapy is expected back here shortly. An Indian runner that came in a few days ago said that he passed Soapy's outfit frozen in near Circle City about a hundred miles from here. I guess he'll sail in on the ice all right. Why, hold hard, pardner! What's the matter? " For Stewart had drawn his great blade from his boot, and was thumbing its edge with malevolent interest.

" Naething at a'! Naething at a'! Go on wi' your story, Macintosh, my man."

The name seemed to interest him greatly, and he murmured it over again: " Macintosh? Whales an' — an' alligators, ye must be Scotch! "

" Nary Scotch, old man," returned the Eldorado king; " I hail from Colorado. Guess the name must be a misfit, for I ain't ever seen Scotland."

" That's maist — maist mar-veillious," grunted the disappointed one reflectively, absentmindedly sheathing his weapon; " but mebbe ye're no' a'th'-gither undeserving o' the name."

Upon which remark the man from Colorado pondered much before discovering the compliment involved.

Meanwhile Mac and Archie had been holding a whispered conversation, in which Soapy Sam and the process recurred frequently, and on Mac's face there was a light of grave satisfaction; but the youth's features expressed only troublous emotion. Evidently the news of their archenemy's presence in the vicinity was not equally pleasant to both.

Macintosh of Eldorado, however, not knowing the import of his casual news, now started his discursive narrative, and soon five at least of his listeners became deeply interested in his words.

" As you may know, boys," he began, " I've been paddling around these creeks since early summer, an' I've got to know a good bit about things since that time. I'd been down here a blessed sight sooner if I'd known for sure where the Alaskan boundary was, for I used to come up from San Francisco regularly with my mates every summer to work the placer ledges on the lower Yukon, which is in United States territory; but we weren't too anxious to cross the boundary if we could help it, an' I'm blest if I know yet whether the Klondike is on the British or American side o' the line."

" It's in the Canadian North West Territory," said the Captain quietly.

" Waal, that's where you're wrong. I reckon the Stars and Stripes own this here ice patch," growled Bill.

" Yes, but you've got a habit of reckoning purely on patriotic lines, Bill," persisted the Captain, smiling.

They would have continued to argue on this point had not Mac warily interposed.

" Those kind of questions always lead to strife, lads," said he; " for of course every man should try and say a word for his own country. Now, so far as I know, there are only four Britishers among us, including the Captain."

" Hold hard there, mate," cried Handsome Harry; " ain't Australia going to get a show? I am an Australian."

" Hurrah for the kangaroo! " howled Stewart.

" Well, that makes five against seven," continued Mac, " which leaves us in the minority, an' —— "

" You're right, pardner," murmured Broncho, " an' the minority counts in my shanty. I reckon we can be good friends without worrying about the blessed boundary."

" Hear! Hear! " shouted the others.

" Anyhow," continued the narrator, whose theme had been so rudely interrupted, " my mates an' I slid up here on chance, an' we struck gold first pop on Eldorado. The Injuns were mighty good to us too, an' supplied us wi' salmon and cariboo when we ran short o' meat. Then I made a discovery. I wanted to prospect a bit farther up the Klondike, an' I asked the Chief o' the Thron-Diucks to give me a guide. What do you think the old chap said? By the Great Republic, he gave me a shock!

" ' White man find danger up Thron-Diuck," he grunted in his odd lingo. " Yellow men up there for many winters. Enemies of the Indians. Steal beaver and salmon. Kill white man if he goes near.' And, as I'm a living sinner, he spoke the truth, boys. There's a village filled with curious yellow cusses somewhere up on the north bank of the river. They

must have drifted over from Siberia, for they don't belong here; but though I've only seen them at a distance, I believe they're holy terrors to fight. The Indians are afraid of them, an' it wasn't any compliment to us when King James moved his camp nearer to their quarters. I've often wondered if the village — which nobody knows exactly where to find — is full of escaped Siberian convicts, or whether they are a Mongolian crowd who have been here for generations. It beats me, boys. None of us know any more than I've told you; but you see it would be a risky business climbing up too near their headquarters, though King James has often hinted of big gold being up there.

" But the most curious part of the story is that Soapy Sam, who was about here even before we arrived, seemed to know a blessed sight more about the yellow man than he ought. He was, in fact, the only white man around these parts who dared go near them, and we got to suspect that they were working a big gold concern under his directions. He kept mighty quiet about it if that was the case but then we were working out on the creek and didn't see him often. Somehow I rather think there are a few men out in that mysterious village who ain't any yellower than I am. Maybe he is working a deep game of his own, though I'm bothered if I believe that he caused the rush by opening his mouth too wide when he was in Seattle. Seems to me it couldn't do him any good to bring a crowd around, but it's just possible some of his mates gave the show away. Anyhow he's back again, or pretty near it by this time, an' I'm open to bet

he vanishes out among the Mongols before we get a square look at him. He's a mighty smart man, is Soapy, an' I've heard he's a leetle too deadly on the shoot to be a healthy companion; besides, he's got an ugly reputation as a bowie handler. I saw him down big Smith, one o' the best men with a knife in Dawson, in less than three minutes. Don't fall foul of Soapy, boys, whatever you do, for there ain't any law up here just now, as you know, and I'm a bit nervous about what he means to do with that mongrel gang of his up the Klondike."

CHAPTER X

THE COMING OF KING JAMES

ARCHIE was standing by the door of the tent next morning, gazing listlessly back over the bleak, white trail they had followed so long and wearily. Beside him Dave gambolled like a ponderous kitten, now and again leaping up on his master with such playful abandonment that the lad had difficulty in keeping his feet after each onslaught. Before him lay Dawson City, silent, deserted, showing no indications of life save by the curling smoke that lazily ascended towards the heavens from each logged and barricaded edifice. The thermometer had fallen to thirty degrees below zero, and the air was keen as the edge of a lance, though not a breath stirred. To the left the Klondike valley could be traced, winding far back in the eastward distance until it was lost amid giant snowy peaks and glistening glacier-capped heights, and all along its banks, and halfway up the flanking mountain steeps, whose sides were torn by numerous ice-filled gullies, a funereal forest of pines extended, with their mighty mass of spreading fronds tipped with silvery rims showing motionless, spectral, in the struggling glimmer of a wintry sun. The whole scene was one of grand beauty, yet of infinite loneliness. For all the world it seemed to Archie as if he were

gazing on a mammoth frosted Christmas card, so still was everything, so cameo-like were the outstanding features of the picture.

Within the tent Stewart and Bill were deeply engrossed preparing with unworthy zeal another epoch-making pudding. Time had tempered their bitter recollections of Stewart's last cruelly indigestible creation, and now Bill was chopping off the flour and other ingredients quite cheerfully under the skilful guidance of the one and only master of the subtle art which called puddings, and dampers, and doughboys alike into being.

Mac and the Captain were talking earnestly together in Broncho's hut, and Broncho himself lay on his bunk studying a two-months-old newspaper with grave interest.

" And this is Klondike," muttered the youth, " the land of frozen gold, the land where a man must carry a revolver in his belt as a natural part of his outfit, and be ready to use it too. Seems to me that this must be the toughest place on the face of the earth at the present moment. The wildest and most improbable stories I ever read didn't describe things half as dreadful as I've seen them here. I wonder if I'll ever get out alive, and, oh! I hope we'll be successful; but I'm afraid of Soapy Sam, though surely he can't be worse than that man yesterday who bragged of having killed seven people. It was strange how he crumpled up when Bill tackled him.

" Hallo, Dave, what's the matter with you now? "

With head upraised and ears pricked, Dave was watching the progress of a distant dog sleigh that

had hove into view round a bend in the Klondike.

"Now I wonder who that will be," said Archie aloud; "I can see only one man, and he's sitting on the sleigh, and he's wrapped up like an Egyptian mummy too."

He continued to gaze at the approaching sleigh, which was travelling along in fine style drawn by six great, long-haired Alaskan husky dogs. Nearer and nearer it came, the crisp frost flying up in sparkling showers before the twin prow of the iceship. And now the form of the traveller could be plainly seen. He was seated on a couchlike arrangement fixed lowset on the sleigh, and muffled in furs from head to foot. Only a part of his face was visible, and it was bronze-red in color.

"Why, he's an Indian!" exclaimed Archie.

"Here, Dave, come back, where are you going?"

With a loud bark the dog had suddenly bounded off down the slope to meet the newcomer, but at the words of his master he hesitated, whined feebly, and slowly returned.

But the attention of the Indian had been attracted by Dave's bark, and he turned his eyes abruptly to where Archie was standing, half-rising in his seat as he did so. Then at a single word, sharp and guttural, his team stopped on the instant. Another explosive grunt from the Indian, and they swung round and headed strenuously up the bank towards the wondering youth. The labored breathing of the dogs, and the shrill hiss of the sleigh runners reached the ears of the men in the hut, and out

they came in sudden alarm just as the panting team drew up to the doorway.

" Why, it's the King! " cried Broncho in surprise. " How do, King James? "

But the Indian scarcely noticed his salutation, he was staring fixedly at Archie, who was now clutching fast to Dave's collar to prevent him from fighting with the other dogs, and in his deep-set eyes there was a look of dignified inquiry and mute reproach which caused the lad to feel anything but comfortable.

" I said: ' How do,' King James," repeated Broncho sternly. " I reckon you ain't forgotten this child already? "

" Um, ugh," responded the King, allowing his attention to waver for a moment. " How do, Broncho? "

Then he pointed an accusing finger at Archie.

" Whar you get dog, Silver Water's dog? "

Without waiting for a reply he broke into a melancholy chant in the quaint monosyllabic dialect of the Thron-Diucks, and to the youth's dismay great tears began to trickle down his furrowed cheek.

" Waal, I'm jiggered," murmured Broncho helplessly.

" Silver Water, swift-foot Silver Water," moaned the King.

At once Archie understood; the Indian had recognized Dave, and had naturally concluded that his late owner had gone to the happy hunting grounds.

" Silver Water is not dead," he cried. " He gave the dog to me."

The King only imperfectly understood the words, but he brightened up wonderfully.

"Say, boys," said the Captain, "let me have a try. I can speak Chinook a bit. But who was Silver Water anyhow?"

"He is the old chap's son," replied Broncho shortly, "an' I guess the King will want that dog, hang his blessed old bones!"

But now the chief of the Thron-Diucks had seemingly come to some conclusion on the matter for himself. He threw aside the bearskin robe that rested on his knees, stepped down from the sleigh, and approached Archie.

"Silver Water give you Dave, Ty-a?"[1] he grunted slowly.

Archie nodded, somewhat sad, for he feared the request he anticipated. But his alarm was groundless. The chief thrust forth a lean and wizened hand.

"Friend Silver Water, friend King James," he said simply.

The youth clasped the proffered hand. "But the dog?" he asked anxiously.

The King stooped and patted Dave's head. "What the Indian gives he takes not away," he uttered clearly. "Friend of Silver Water, paleface from the land of mighty kings, welcome to the home of the red man, welcome to the gold of the Thron-Diucks."

Without apparent effort, with scarce a pause, the words had flowed forth, then the old man turned and walked back to his sleigh.

[1] Dyea.

" Don't be in such a hurry, King James," cried Mac, intercepting him. " We've got to tell you all about it yet, and of course you'll have some 'baccy, and — and I actually believe I'll be moved, out o' sheer friendship, to give you a brand new pipe to smoke it in."

The King smiled, then his eyes caught sight of Stewart in the tent, diligently and calmly manipulating the recalcitrant and gluey dough of his pudding, and they glistened appreciatively.

" Good cook, squaw," he murmured irrelevantly, and as a willing victim he was led into the tent.

It was not long before the chief of the Thron-Diucks was made fully aware of the whole story connected with Dave's change of ownership.

The Captain recited it volubly enough in Chinook, and Mac explained it more briefly, and apparently more satisfactorily, in English, after which Stewart added many touching and eloquent details in a terse language all his own, though he was mightily offended when the target of his well-chosen remarks inconsiderately tittered with glee at the most moving passages of his narrative, and generally betrayed a sublime ignorance of what was being so lucidly expounded to him.

" He thinks you're telling him about the last pudding you manufactured," laughed Mac.

" Humph! " snorted Stewart; " I'm thinkin' he's mair interested in the one I'm bakin'. "

And in truth it now seemed as if he had summed up the situation exactly, for there could be no denying that King James was betraying a lively sympathy in the cook squaw's subtle operations, even

if he were not attending as he ought to that learned gentleman's profound observations on another topic.

But now arose a somewhat delicate situation.

The Indian, having accepted the invitation of his hosts to rest for a little while under their canvas roof, showed no inclination to terminate his visit within a reasonable period.

Mac's presents of the tobacco and pipe — the latter rather grudgingly given, because of the donor discovering at the last moment that it was the only spare one in the camp, — were received with profuse thanks, and straightway utilized. Archie's offering of a small revolver and a box of cartridges was accepted with extravagant expressions of gratitude, and the Captain's gift, in the shape of a tiny penknife, for which he had no use, aroused hilarious delight.

But never once did the Indian venture to vacate the position he had taken up near the stove. There he crouched, dreamily smoking the pipe of peace and contentment, but keeping a watchful eye on the vessel into which Stewart had popped the doubtful delicacy he had wrought into shape.

Outside the waiting dogs pawed the snow impatiently, and howled at intervals, but he heeded them not.

At last he broke into a rambling recital of the doings of his tribe, of their strength and cunning as hunters of the dread grisly, and the savage silver bear, of their prowess as warriors; and when he got to this stage he struck off at a tangent and fiercely inveighed against the yellow men who intruded on his domain.

Clearly this was a subject that rankled in his Indian bosom.

"White man in Dawson baby," he grunted gloomily. "White man in Dawson heap much frightened yellow men. Ugh! White man never know whar big gold come from. Too-much-gold for paleface squaws up Thron-Diuck."

"Go slow on that, old fireworks," grumbled Bill. "Blow me, you're gettin' too gol'-dashed personal for my taste."

Then Mac endeavored to calm the wrathful monarch, and lead his thoughts into more pacific grooves, but all to no purpose.

"See here, Leatherskin," declaimed Stewart, brandishing a floury fist erratically in order to lend greater emphasis to his remarks, "your insinuations are maist hurtfu' to my dignity. The question is: Will ye gang awa' quietly, or dae ye mean to wait an' let the pudden work its evil way upon ye?"

At once a broad grin o'erspread the King's face. He fairly puckered to the eyes with delight.

"You good cook, squaw," he murmured with an appreciative nod. "King James wait pudden."

"Oh my!" groaned Bill, "you've done it now, I reckon. We'll have old Sawdust here campin' wi' us for a week if we don't get rid of him quick."

Stewart smiled a sickly smile and was silent.

The King beamed benignantly all round, and resumed his speech.

Meanwhile Mac hauled forth his huge gun from its case and began to clean it industriously, and soon the Indian's gaze concentrated on the powerful-looking weapon.

'Big thunder thar, Mis'r Mac," he grunted gleefully.

"Yes, Jamie," returned Mac earnestly. "That wee cannon would tickle your yellow friends, I'm thinkin'."

The old chief looked straight into Mac's face, and Archie, who was close by, was horrified to observe the regal features contort into something approaching a wink.

"You great man, Mis'r Mac. You no 'fraid yellow men. You mighty brave. Me show you whar big gold come from. Me show you Too-much-gold. Heap big gold, ugh!"

Silently he arose and walked out to the waiting sleigh.

"That's fixed him," said Bill. "Your gun's frightened him off this time, Mac; more power to it."

But his remarks were rather premature.

King James returned almost immediately, carrying in his open hand a nugget as large as an ordinary potato.

A cry of wonder burst from all as they beheld the glittering specimen, and Broncho, who had retired to his bunk, came rushing round to investigate the cause of the disturbance.

"Only a chunk o' gold!" he complained regretfully. "I — I thought it might ha' been somethin' to eat."

"Only a chunk!" cried Mac. "Did you ever see a bonnier bit o' the yellow metal?"

"No," admitted Broncho, without enthusiasm. "I reckon it beats the stuff in Bonanza an' Eldo-

rado hollow, but — but — ye can't eat gold." And he returned sadly to his rest.

"Wat you think, Mis'r Mac?" demanded the King, smiling most pleasantly.

"It's good stuff, Jamie," answered Mac.

"It's a thunderin' size too," growled Bill, almost enviously. "I wonder where the old buffer got it."

The glistening nodule was passed round without further comment, and Archie, who received it last, handed it back to the Indian with a little sigh.

To his immense surprise it was waved aside right royally.

"Keep, young paleface with sharp eyes. King James no want yellow stone. Heap big gold up Thron-Diuck; me show you if no 'fraid come."

At last they understood the meaning of the old chief's cryptic utterance. Before, they had not grasped the true import of his speech, deeming he spoke allegorically.

"He will lead us to the unknown creek where the gold lies, lads," spoke Mac quietly, "and it's somewhere up in the Mongol's country. Are we afraid to go?"

"Frichtened to go," bellowed Stewart, prancing around in the confined space at his disposal as delicately as his heavily padded moccasins would permit. "The man wha says I was ever frichted will dearly rue his te-mer-ity. Leatherskin, my dear frien', I would drink your health this meenit, only there's naething but half-melted snow in the coffee-pot. But the vera last bit o' the pudden will be yours, only I hope it disna kill you afore your guid intentions ma-terialize."

" Hurrah for the Indian gold! " roared Bill and the Captain boisterously in unison.

" Too-much-gold," repeated King James. " Too-much-gold —— "

" Not by a blessed ounce, thar ain't," cried Bill jovially, patting the Indian on the shoulder, " an' nary mongrel Mongol will skeer us nuther —— "

Mac frowned. " You're behaving like a lot o' thoughtless schoolboys," he said severely; " though, I will admit, I'm not unaffected myself. Still, the risk must be taken into account —— "

" Ho! ho! fancy Mac buckin' against takin' risks," chuckled Bill.

" My irresponsible friend," retorted Mac with unruffled severity, " I've looked on danger so often that I'd actually feel lonely if I didn't see it always near at hand. In fact I've chased the phantom oftener than it's chased me, but — but —— "

" You're thinking of me," said Archie quietly; " but why shouldn't I shoulder my own part of the burden. You've tried to make everything easy for me, but I will take my chances just like others, I can shoot as straight as most men — the fact is, I'm going Mac — along with you."

" The stake is big, laddie, but human life may be in the hidden balance. However — so be it."

Mac was evidently more troubled than he cared to show, and yet, almost immediately after, he was as exuberant as the lightest hearted of his comrades. Once decided, for him there was no turning back.

And King James continued to expatiate on the wonderful riches of what he was pleased to term " Too-much-gold Creek," only varying his theme

by occasional reference to the murderous qualities of the various firearms of the party.

It appeared that he had come into Dawson for the express purpose of obtaining news of Silver Water, though it was clearly enough evident that the wily old man had also had views of inducing some of the miners to extend their prospecting journeys farther up the river. There was no mistaking the fact that he was somewhat dubious about his Asiatic neighbors; but he was also well aware that a motley band of whites in his near neighborhood would be equally troublesome to him and his people. Thus he was most earnest in his solicitations for secrecy, though doubtless he knew full well that for the sake of their own aggrandizement his white friends would keep silent enough. So the hours passed, and at last, having partaken of a goodly share of the *piece-de-resistance* of the long-deferred meal, King James reluctantly rose to depart.

"Great cook, squaw," he murmured appreciatively, smacking his lips.

The appellation by no means pleased the fiery Stewart, but with visions of Too-much-gold on his mental horizon he bravely gulped down his growing wrath, and smiled sweetly on the disturber of his peace.

"I would give ye mair pudden," he remarked with a savageness belying his smooth aspect, "but Dave has wolfed the last o't as usual. Hooever, I'll be even wi' you some o' them days."

The King nodded gleefully, and was about to repeat the offensive epithet, when Mac intervened.

"How are we goin' to know where to find Too-

much-gold, Jamie," he asked, for indeed it seemed as if the Indian had forgotten all about his promise by this time.

" Come village. Follow track," grunted the chief, gathering his furs around him, and taking his seat on the waiting sleigh.

The dogs jerked forward in their traces and were half-way down towards the river before their impetuous rush could be checked. Apparently King James had something more to say. Eagerly the men pressed forward.

" Be sure bring cook squaw," came a satisfied voice from the sleigh.

Once more the team plunged ahead, and Stewart's heartfelt exclamations of disgust were effectually drowned by the shriek of the sleigh runners and Dave's noisy demonstrations of farewell.

Now it would only be fair to relate that Stewart's second essay into the empyrean heights of gourmetic desire resulted much more satisfactorily than did his earlier wavering flutter in a similar epicurean direction. It is true that the obvious material achievement was unlovely enough in both cases; for, try as he might, the great alchemist could not coax his creations into anything like the symmetrical and rotund form which his poetic soul desired; nevertheless this second evidence of his undaunted endeavor met with a most flattering reception, nor did it appear unduly to disturb the equanimity of those who tremblingly partook of it — and herein, though by this time, in a metaphorical sense, lay its crowning glory.

Archie had a shrewd idea that this good effect was

brought about because of the sundry embargoes placed by the uninitiated on the cook's originality, by which beans and oats and various other comestibles were eschewed from the compound, and probably he was not far wrong; but, be that as it may, Stewart's face that afternoon reflected the feelings of one who had attained much indeed, and he blushed with modest pride when Broncho sang into his ear a characteristic pæan of triumph for the wondrous work accomplished.

It had been arranged that on the following morning the attempt was to be made to follow the guiding trail made by King James's sleigh, and, if possible, locate the Indian settlement that same evening; but then no one knew how far the trail might lead, even if it could be followed throughout, for in places the light conveyance would leave scarce a mark.

"It's a pity we din't ask him where the village was," said Archie; "but it can't be very far, or he couldn't get there himself in one day."

"And it ain't very likely he'll try," moodily reflected Bill. "I reckon an Injun don't take any count o' a hunner-mile journey; he'll jest camp whar night finds him."

"It's strange we didn't think of asking him the distance, as Archie says," said the Captain.

"The chances are he couldn't have told us anyway," put in Mac. "You see, an Indian judges only by time. But we'll get there all the same. Are you going to come with us, Broncho?"

"Nary, pard; that is unless you need an extra man wi' a shootin' iron in your outfit. You kin bet I don't figure much on gold now. I've got all I want,

an' grub's too scarce for me to go gallivantin' about working up an appetite. I wish — I wish I could go to sleep like a ba'r."

"Well, maybe you'll take care o' our stores then. We must go as light as possible, and if we could leave half o' the outfit here, we could slide along a bit faster."

"Howlin' blizzards, pard, don't tempt me," moaned Broncho. "For a dead cert the sight o' the stuff would make me hungry; but if you'll let me use a little ——"

"I'm drapping saut tears o' sorrow for ye, Broncho," wailed Stewart. "I'm sure nane o' us will grudge ——"

"Two dollars a pound in gold I'll plank out for every pound I use, boys ——"

"To the mischief with your dollars!" stormed Mac. "Take the flour and anything else as you need it. We're not afraid to trust you, Broncho, my man, but we'll be in a very bad way when we drive a bargain with a man for the necessities o' life."

"Hear! hear!" cried the Captain.

"Boys," murmured Broncho, and the old dare-devilry in his voice had given place to a deep uncontrollable emotion, "I ain't goin' to say much, but I want you to know right now that if you don't make a rise at Too-much-gold, you kin take over my pegs in Eldorado. I guess I've got enough out'n the ground to last me."

He was silent; then Stewart got himself up and made feeling reply.

"Broncho, my vera dear frien', you don't ken this crowd yet. We may be poor, but we are honest, as

the poetry book says, an' the ways o' the Philistines are no' our ways."

Stewart's well-intentioned if somewhat mixed panegyric might have been continued for some length, but at that moment there came a series of loud cheers from the vicinity of the saloon in Dawson barely two hundred yards off.

"Hang it, I hope it ain't another circus," cried Broncho, on the alert immediately. "Them picnic parties of the Sheriff's are gettin' mighty monotonous. He ain't a real sheriff, you know, though he calls himself by that name. He's a blessed bounder, and I wish he were somewhere else. Let's go out and have a look."

The daylight was fading fast, though it was but little after two o'clock, and when they stood outside the door of the tent they found considerable difficulty in making out any objects through the gathering gloom. It was easy enough to guess, however, what had happened, for the air was now filled with the snarling cries of hungry sleigh dogs as they fought for the food that was apparently being thrown to them.

Someone had arrived in from the north; someone, too, who was evidently fairly well known to the saloon frequenters, judging by their uproarious acclamations.

"Now I wonder who that will be," mused Broncho. "No one went out on that trail that I knows on. Why, dash my boots, it must be Soapy!"

"The Lord hath delivered him into my hands," recited Stewart devoutedly.

Mac carefully examined the charges of his revolver, and said nothing.

It was Archie who seemed most distressed.

"Don't go near him, Mac," he entreated. "It can do no good now, and, anyhow, he — he might shoot first."

"Archie's right," spoke the Captain grimly. "Now look here, Mac, don't get rusty. I know you haven't had too much practice with the revolver, and most likely you wouldn't want to kill the man in any case. You would crush him to pieces in a fair fight; but Soapy's kind never fight fair. Let me take over your quarrel —— "

"No you don't!" growled Bill. "I reckon I'm the man to tackle Soapy, an' for Archie's sake I'm goin' to prevent Mac from committin' susanside. I guess my barker will speak as sudden as Soapy's."

"It's my circus, lads," said Mac calmly. "I never delegate duties o' this kind —— "

"Unless to me," grunted Stewart.

Broncho stared aghast. "Blow me for an innocent little lamb, boys, you must feel purty bad 'bout Soapy. But you needn't think you could pick a quarrel wi' him: he would see it comin' a mile off, I reckon, an' shoot ye deader'n a door nail, which I've allus understood is the gol'-dashed deadest thing on earth."

But despite all arguments for and against the instant extinction of the valiant Soapy, it was plain that action could not well be taken in the matter at such a time.

"We'd better let our quarrel hold for a bit," reasoned the Captain; "that is, unless he's got Archie's contrivance with him."

"Why," cried Archie, as a new light struck him.

" I wonder if he thought he would find use for the process here? "

" I mean to get to the bottom o' this," persisted Mac stubbornly. " I'll call on Soapy first thing after daylight."

They went back to their tent, all but Broncho trying to reason out what scheme their enemy had in view with regard to the use of Archie's invention; and as Broncho, as yet, had no idea of what they were talking about, his additions to the conversation were restricted to such a minimum that he promptly fell asleep, and rolled off his perch on a flour sack, and the first sight that met his gaze after his rude awakening was rather disturbing to his nerves.

Stewart was seated near, and with preoccupied expression was listlessly stropping his dreadful knife on his moccasined leg, sure proof that gory feelings surged uppermost in his heart.

" Great Washington! " roared the fallen one, " have ye carved me wi' that thar pig sticker? "

" It's a nightmare you've got, I'm thinkin'," softly spoke the wielder of the blade. " I suppose the pudden will get the blame as usual." He sighed, sheathed the weapon, and prepared to boil the coffee for the evening meal.

That night, about six o'clock, the moon, almost full, shot up from behind a frowning glacier peak, and filled the valley with her pale eerie radiance. It shone on the scattered shanties of Dawson, and on the broad Yukon beyond. It scintillated on the winding Klondike, so that the icebound channel showed like a silvery belt of foam between its pine-clad banks.

Archie aroused himself from a drowsy reverie and went out to gaze upon the brilliant scene. In truth he wanted to be alone with his thoughts for a little, for the crowding events of the past day surged tumultuously through his brain. He could scarcely believe that things were real around him, though it pressed heavily on his mind that some vague disaster threatened.

Soapy Sam's coming at such a time most surely meant trouble. In vain he tried to puzzle out a way to avoid the impending strife. His eyes roved listlessly towards the saloon, where various muffled figures were now to be seen hurrying backwards and forwards as if engaged in some urgent work of preparation. And, sure enough, there was some method in their movements. The dog sleigh had again come into prominence, and it was clear that the team was being harnessed up for a further journey. A few minutes later the noisy mutterings of the dogs made this fact evident beyond all doubt: they were once more to face the trail, but whither could they be bound now?

Archie was conscious of a sudden sensation of relief. If Soapy Sam left that night there would be no fear of a dangerous quarrel in the morning. Eagerly he hoped that the departure of the outfit would be less noisy than its advent, so that Mac might not know. But his wish was destined not to be fulfilled.

Before long a shouting throng had collected around the sleigh, and a voice which was unmistakably Soapy's rose above the uproar.

"All right, Sheriff, I'll be with ye in two shakes

o' a muskitter's eyelid. Ease off the near trace, Chilcoot. Hang it, ye cross-eyed son o' a gun! don't ye see you're chokin' the leader? "

An angry retort from the individual addressed was drowned in the hoarse cheer that rose from the assembly; then the pulsating line of dogs strained in their harness, the following sleigh jerked and jarred then quickly glided forward.

By this time, Mac, Stewart, and the others had been aroused by the disturbance, and they hastily came out beside Archie to investigate matters for themselves.

And when they gazed once, they, without a word, dashed back into the tent, re-emerging almost immediately bearing among them the entire arsenal of the party, and Archie too, with a grim exclamation, drew his heavy Colt from its holster, and quietly ranged himself alongside his companions, for the sleigh had swung off the main trail and was heading towards them, and by its side strode half a dozen or more loudly jeering men, led by the redoubtable Sheriff of unpleasant memory.

" I reckon we could do wi' Broncho's gun in this here scrimmage," murmured Kentucky Bill, breaking a tense silence.

" And Broncho ain't keepin' out o' sight, you can bet purty solid on that," came a languid voice near at hand. " I'm standin' by ye, boys, every time."

Nearer and nearer drew the advancing procession, and now Soapy Sam's short squat figure loomed up plainly alongside the taller bulk of the Sheriff; but the moonlight gleamed on the face of another man whom Archie had cause to remember, for it was

none other than Chilcoot Charlie who guided the sleigh, and it was his voice that rasped most continuously on the still night air.

On they came, apparently in no wise concerned to notice the stern little band that awaited them; hut, when they were but a few yards off, Mac's terrible gun swung to the horizontal, and his voice rang out sharp and clear:

"Another step and I'll blow the lot o' you into decimal fractions. Hands up! Soapy Sam."

The sleigh stopped with a suddenness that drew the dogs back on their haunches.

Soapy Sam stopped too, as did also Chilcoot Charlie and those behind, who indeed appeared considerably dismayed by the rude challenge.

The Sheriff alone continued his march for a few short steps, so overcome with mirth that he did not observe he was playing a solo part.

"You'd be a blamed sight safer back among your friends, old man," warned Kentucky Bill coolly. "I mean to make cold meat o' ye instanter!"

And the wordy fire-eater, looking hurriedly around, choked in his throat the brave response he would have uttered, and leaped back with startling promptitude.

It was very evident that the visitors had not reckoned on such summary treatment; probably they had anticipated being received with meek submissiveness, for otherwise it was strange they had not been more aggressively prepared. True, they had weapons in plenty, but they scarcely dared risk drawing them now that the other side so clearly held the drop.

The concourse of quasi miners who had brought up the rear now seemed to take a very indifferent interest in things: they even pretended to be impartial beholders of the unruly scene before them.

"It ain't no go, Sheriff," cried one, sidling gently out of the line of fire. "You don't get any fun out'n that crowd, I reckon."

"I think I suggested that you should elevate your hands, my man," came Mac's voice again, addressing Soapy, who stood motionless, gazing with questioning glance towards his challenger.

"Rush 'em, boys, rush 'em!" roared the Sheriff. "Sam, ye promised to stand by me!"

But Sam had by this time raised his arms.

"The fact is," said he mildly, "I only drew in here to get a look at the boys that had bust you up, an' I will admit I meant to sail in an' have a bit of a scrap if they turned rusty; but I'm a soft-hearted chap, I am, an' anyways I've met three o' them before, an' — well they're friends of mine, they are. Let up wi' the gun, pard," he continued, appealing to Mac, "I didn't know you were one o' the crowd that held up the Sheriff."

"You, you — white-livered — " so the Sheriff began, but he was interrupted promptly and fiercely.

"Fur them words I'll chaw you into strips —— "

"Ho! ho! ho!" chuckled Bill. "Do let 'em both have a go, Mac! It would be better'n a circus."

Again the crowd drew nearer; after all there was a good deal of method in the Sheriff's taunt.

Chilcoot Charlie drew his revolver hurriedly in the brief interlude, but, before he could raise it, Archie

stepped forward, his own weapon on a level with his old enemy's head.

"Stand aside," he cried sharply, "and drop that revolver. I mean to have a look at your sleigh now that you've brought it so near. Keep an eye on him, Stewart."

"I'll whistle the tap off his cocoa-nut in twa jiffs if he moves," genially remarked that personage. "Now, keep vera still, an' look pleasant, Chilcoot, or you'll get your fotygraf took sort o' sudden like."

The youth was not long in making all the inspection he desired.

The Process was not there, that was certain. He returned to Mac's side.

"They haven't got it," he said quietly. "Perhaps we've been blaming him wrongly."

Mac seemed puzzled, and for one brief second his attention was distracted and his weapon wavered, but it was enough for Soapy; with a quick backward spring he sheltered himself behind the sleigh.

The entire little drama had occupied scarcely over a minute altogether, but to the principal actors present the time seemed ages.

"Let him go, Mac," advised the Captain. "You've humbled him enough."

By this time the Sheriff and his satellites had melted into the shadows, only Soapy and his snarling aide-de-camp remained.

"All right," said Mac reluctantly, "but I'm not just sure ——"

"Drive on your mule team, Soapy, my man," entreated Stewart. "I'll hae pleasure in squelching you some ither time."

" Right ye are, pard," retorted Soapy, with apparently unruffled temper. " I hope ye don't mind my dodgin' out o' range. I was gettin' mighty nervous I kin tell you. Goodbye, boys! See you later."

There was a significance in his last words which was not lost on the members of the little party.

Mac made a half-step forward, but just then the dogs, obeying a sharp command from Chilcoot Charlie, broke ahead, and the sleigh, careening dangerously, dashed down the slope towards the Klondike almost in the identical tracks made by the King's team early in the afternoon; and when a respectable distance had been placed between it and the onlookers, a harsh voice floated back to them above the swishing sound of the sleigh runners.

" We'll be even wi' ye for this afore long, an' don't you forget it."

" I don't exactly know what to make o' things," muttered Mac, much perplexed. " Are you quite sure, Archie, about the patent not bein' on the sled? '

" It wasn't there," answered the lad with conviction. " There was nothing but stores and mining tools on board."

" Maybe he hid the boxes somewhere," suggested Stewart.

" But what good would that do him? " questioned the Captain. " And plainly he did not expect to see the owner of the contrivance here, and he had no need to hide the concern from other people."

" All the same," persisted Mac, " Soapy stole the Process, an' I mean sooner or later to know more about it. I couldn't vera well shoot the man in cold blood, and, for that part of it, I wouldn't have

any man's life on my conscience; but I'll see Archie righted yet."

"I wonder whar the slippery skunk is goin'?" growled Bill. "Blow me if he ain't streakin' up the Klondike as if ole Harry was after him."

"You may take it from me, boys," languidly murmured Broncho, "Soapy and his mate hev got the hang o' Too-much-gold, an' ain't losin' any time 'bout gettin' thar nuther."

"Didn't we hear of a Mongol village being somewhere up in the same direction?" reminded Archie. "I think Soapy is going to join his yellow friends."

"I don't care 'bout your trusting yourselves alongside such a measly crowd," persisted Broncho stubbornly. "Better wait here, boys. Take over my pegs on Eldorado."

But they would not hear more. The die was cast. For good or ill it had been decided to seek out the Indian's secret treasure; nothing would now deter them from this object.

"I'll not deny that things are beginning to look a wee bit sanguinary, Stewart," confided Mac cheerfully, as all re-entered the tent, "but I feel better after that bit o' a contre-temps ——"

"Now you've done it," wailed his associate, "you've actually made use o' a bad word in my hearin'. Think shame o' yersel', Mac, an' Archie listenin' to you too. A maist unrighteous expression, a maist sinfu' ap-pelation. What does it mean, Mac, my vera dear frien'? I want to add it to my repertory. It would be a grand word to knock a man doon wi'."

"You parboiled emblem o' innocence!" inter-

rupted the unwitting cause of the outburst, " go and study your geometry book. I can't be expected to elucidate Hebrew language to you at your time o' life."

Whereat Stewart smiled with unwonted sweetness. At last he felt he had triumphed.

" Vera weel, my man," said he calmly, " I'm an ornithorhynchus paradoxus. I'll make nae mair complaint. That's a bonnie wee German word I learned oot o' the joggraphy book."

Then there was an awed silence.

CHAPTER XI

THE FINDING OF TOO-MUCH-GOLD CREEK

On the following morning the adventurous little band were early astir making preparations for their projected journey to the creek of Too-much-gold, It was true they had but meagre and uncertain details regarding its whereabouts, and it was also true that the expedition was one involving great risk, yet all were enthusiastic and eager for the start. Little they recked of danger once their resolve was made; not a hint of the darker aspect of their mission was visible on any of their faces. Mac superintended the loading of the sleigh, Stewart, with wary judgment, calculating up and apportioning out the necessary stores for a several weeks' sojourn away from their main supplies, and the Captain and Bill carried the remainder of their joint possessions into Broncho's hut whilst that gentleman was still in the arms of Morpheus; and, having nothing better to do, Archie busied himself making a set of small moccasins for Dave to wear over his paws, thus showing remarkable foresight, for the trail towards the mountains would be difficult and severe. It was a novel idea, yet born of much observation, and when Dave tested his snow-boots in a preliminary canter he barked out his appreciation lustily.

Long before daybreak they were ready to start,

and then they waited impatiently on the laggard dawn; only the tent was left unpacked, and this could be done at the last moment, as had been their custom heretofore. A heavy blackness enshrouded the land until nearly eleven o'clock in the forenoon, and then a dull gray light broke over the wastes of snow and ice and showed up the cheerless prospect before them. Dave welcomed the sun's tardy approach in his usual vociferous fashion. Like the rest, he was imbued with the spirit of the trail, which makes movement an all-important feature of life for the time being. And there was not much further delay.

"Stand by the guy ropes, lads," cried Mac, and at once willing hands released the strain on the frozen cords holding the tent in position, yet the canvas structure did not slacken its tension or give way in the slightest degree, for it was frozen fast as it stood, with walls like sheet iron.

"There's been a wee bit o' a freeze last night surely," grunted Stewart.

Archie looked at the thermometer, still hanging on a tree near by.

"Forty below zero, boys," he said brightly. "We are likely to have a tough time travelling to-day."

They forthwith proceeded to build several fires around the tent, and soon the canvas roof drooped and fell, and was promptly rolled up and packed on the sleigh.

"Are you ready, lads?" cried Mac again.

"Right!" they responded with one voice.

"Gee up, Dave," ordered Stewart, steadying the sleigh with one hand so as to guide its downward

course towards the river. But before they got a start Broncho made a final appeal.

" Don't go, boys," he entreated. " Hitch on at Eldorado —— "

" So long, old wearyhide," broke in Bill with a laugh. " If I don't come back, I reckon you can swallow my share o' the grub, an' welcome."

" All aboard for Too-much-gold! " shouted Archie. Dave barked and sprang ahead. The snow churned up in fleecy clouds above the miscellaneous baggage on the sleigh, and with all hands checking the momentum, the well-freighted snowship plunged down the slope and launched forth on the Klondike's icebound channel. Broncho watched it until it appeared as a mere black speck in the distance, then he sighed, shook his head sadly, and returned to complete his interrupted slumbers.

With the bulk of their stores reduced from the weight they had formerly had to pull, the expedition scudded along the lower reaches of the Klondike with remarkable ease. There was now no need for every one to lend their labors at the same time, so Mac and the Captain took alternate spells with Stewart and Bill in aiding Dave. Archie, as usual, marked the trail ahead, seeking out the smoothest parts of the channel for the rest to follow, and in this work he was assisted at times by Stewart and Bill, who ever seemed most eager to be in the forefront.

It was nearly one o'clock when they reached the confluence of the golden Bonanza creek, where the main river took a broad sweep in its course, and the strange domelike mountain towards the south,

around whose base the first of the Yukon treasure was discovered, frowned down on them from its misty heights as they rounded the great white curve and headed eastward into the glimmering glacier-capped spurs of the mighty Rockies. The brittle snowcrust that covered the ice grew more and more retarding as they proceeded: the light powder clung to the runners like glue, and the sleigh soon began to emit harsh jarring sounds under the strain of its unwilling progress. Soon, too, the temperature of the air began to alter in a most marked fashion. The thermometer dropped rapidly until it registered fifty degrees below zero, then a fine frost began to fall in soft, almost invisible showers which covered the little procession with a scintillating garb, and filled their ears and nostrils. Icy appendages quickly formed at their most prominent features, and a thin, cold film spread itself over their cheeks; indeed their visages became practically framed in icicles. Dave, too, suffered like his human companions, and every few minutes he would shake the glittering spangles from his glossy body, and rub his head in the snow to clear his vision. Archie, as he marched along, wondered vaguely if this were the worst they would be called upon to endure. His breath froze as it issued from his mouth, and he had to wink vigorously at times to prevent his eyelashes from freezing to his cheeks. At one time he turned to address a remark to Mac, when, to his surprise, he found he could not articulate a word. As for Stewart and Bill, for once they were compelled to trudge along in silence, for their mouths were sealed as if by iron bands.

They made good pace, notwithstanding the deterrent features of the rising trail. Here and there they caught a glimpse of the track made by King James's sleigh, but more often it was the sharp imprint of Soapy Sam's conveyance that met their eyes, for its iron-shod runners had left their mark on even the hardest of snow patches, where the light birch skids of the royal equipage had made scarce an impression.

Another hour passed and they entered a long dark gorge which led upwards at an alarming angle, the icy channel being broken here and there by gigantic rocks. The grandeur of this cañon was beyond description; its precipitous sides almost united overhead, and great gleaming stalactites dripped from each moisture-retaining crevice. Solid ice pillars, many feet in thickness, and seemingly bearing up the overhanging rocks, were numerous as trees in a forest, and the only available passage twisted and zigzagged around and between their glistening trunks. The sky was now completely shut out, and the adventurers forged ahead in a vague eerie shadow reflected from the translucent pillars. Here and there the roar of the flood echoed thunderously from clefts in the ice, causing the glassy walls to quiver and crackle; then again would come the oppressive calm, broken only by the dull rumble of the buried torrent full fifty feet below. And ever and anon a glittering mass would become dislodged from overhead and fall, shivering into a thousand fragments on the crystal floorway.

Slowly they progressed through the darksome cavern; the impeding snowcrust was not now in evidence, but the ascent was so steep that they could

only with difficulty retain a footing with their moccasins. Dave at this stage did most of the pulling, the pads on his active paws proving an unqualified success. It seemed to Archie that they were traversing a region well fitted to be the home of the hobgoblins and demons. The walls on either side were by this time over eighty feet in height, and absolutely unscalable, and a beautiful icy trelliswork stretched right across the middle distance like a fantastic spider's web. The thermometer, meanwhile, kept falling degree by degree until the red spirit had disappeared in the glass altogether, and the indicator stood at sixty degrees below zero.

The icy appendages at their chins and eyes had meanwhile grown exceedingly lengthy and ludicrous to behold, and they broke them off gingerly, fearing to do damage to their features.

"By the Great Mississippi," ejaculated Bill, forcing his lips apart with considerable effort, "this ain't just what you would call a picnic, is it?"

"Have a look up, boys," said the Captain, opening his mouth after much pantomimic performance. "Isn't the roof beautiful?"

They carefully bent back their necks to examine the sight that had aroused the Captain's admiration, and when Archie had looked he turned and gazed questioningly at Mac, and at the same time Mac's eyes sought his in meaning apprehension. Then the Captain, having worked his features slack, bellowed out in fine style:

"I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls ——"

"For any sake stop, Captain," said Mac in a hushed whisper, gripping the singer's arm repres-

sively. "You'll bring it down on us. We must be under a glacier."

Even while he spoke the pillared and trellised roof vibrated and crackled ominously, and they drew aside to the walls of the cañon hurriedly. There could indeed be little doubt as to their position; one of the glaciers which had formerly crowned a flanking ridge had apparently slipped from its position and bridged the cañon with its ponderous icy bulk. The deep blue of the vast field seemed to scintillate with a hundred varying hues as they looked, and great drops of moisture gathered and fell at every point in its vapory expanse. They had not noticed their entry under this strange canopy, so insidiously had the network of ice pillars, which had been with them from the start, merged into the more solid covering. How long the mighty icefield had been in its present position could be but a matter for conjecture, but, judging from the freshly splintered ice boulders that lay scattered around, its advent must have been quite a recent occurrence. It was Archie who proved this to be the case. While the others stood bewildered, gazing on the impressive scene, his eyes located the sharply defined tracks of Soapy Sam's sleigh, and they led under and not around the obstructing fragments.

"Friend Soapy has had a narrow shave," remarked the Captain slowly.

"And we're by no means safe yet ourselves," grunted Mac; "but in case more o' the solid element takes a thought to come down, we'd better push along."

"Oh, why did I leave my hame?" chanted Stew-

art. " This is nae place for a pair o' nervish innocents like Mac an' me. Gee up, Dave, an' stop winkin' at me this meenit."

Again the sleigh jerked forward, and this time it required the united strength of the party to start it, for during the brief halt the runners had frozen fast to the ice. The light was at this stage so dim that they could scarcely see a dozen yards in front, and they trod cautiously, and with a considerable feeling of uneasiness predominating in their minds. The thermometer had registered its lowest limit, and remained fast at sixty below zero. The spirit had frozen solid! For another five minutes they continued their hesitating advance, then suddenly they emerged into the open and with a cry of satisfaction looked once more on the sky above and the hills around. But the light of day was now little better than the gloom of the cañon.

" We'll need to camp and wait for the moon, lads," said Mac. " Look out for a sheltered place with timber handy, Archie, and we'll draw in and make a fire."

The valley here was broken by numberless gullies which bore in their deep-cleft channels slowly moving trains of ice that issued from the steep glacier-capped peaks on either side; and where these tributaries joined the main river great bridges of crystal fragments barred the path. Over them the undismayed pioneers forced a trail, strenuous and stubborn, though the sharp, flintlike edges of the ice made havoc with their clothing and penetrated their moccasins. Then at last they halted by a belt of rough pine scrub and waited for the moon to guide their further progress.

"I guess that's the toughest trail I've ever struck," growled Bill, assisting Archie to build a fire. "I don't reckon this here country is fit for a white man."

"But then, think of Too-much-gold," said Archie quizzically.

"It's a lang, lang road that keeps on turning," chortled Stewart. "Where there's a swill there's a sway, as the poetry book says. Hoorah for Too-much-gold! Noo, hurry up wi' that fire, ye procrastinatin' sinners, or as sure's you're livin' I'll start an' tell ye a story."

It was nearly four hours later when they resumed their journey by moonlight. The air was bitterly cold, and mile after mile of the blistered flanking ice was traversed in compulsory silence, and the stars twinkled and shone brilliantly, and great flashes of dazzling light shot at intervals across the trembling sky. The heavens were ablaze with a wonderful glory, such as Archie had never before witnessed, and mutely he admired the splendor of the sight as he led the dogged night wanderers onwards and upwards, ever upwards towards the Klondike's unknown source.

It was no longer possible to observe the Indian's trail, nor were the deeper markings of Soapy Sam's sleigh anywhere visible. The entire space between the river banks was as a sea of phosphorescent foam. For full three hours they struggled along, keeping up a half-ambling pace throughout, despite the difficulties of the way, and by this time they were all anxiously alert for signs of the Indian habitation. To the north a thick wooded forest prevailed, sloping

back into the distance, but the southern horizon was still barred by a serrated line of crystal eminences whose lower altitudes only were feathered by a sparse belt of spruce birch and pine.

" I think we must have come about thirty miles," thought Archie. " Surely we can't have much farther to go."

Then Stewart, who was stumbling along by his side, uttered an exclamation:

" I see the Injun camp. Hoorah! we're near the Land o' Goshen noo."

He said something else as he clapped his hand to his cheek and felt the damage that the splintering ice had done thereto.

Archie opened his mouth to condole with the sufferer, but, thinking better of it, he closed it again without remark. Speech was costly without due preparation. But he was infinitely pleased that Stewart had not made a mistake.

The ruddy glare of a fire illuminated the tree-tops on the left bank some distance ahead, and as they rounded a bluff on the river's course a miscellaneous arrangement of tepees and log-huts came into view snuggling amid a clearing in the forest. Without a word Archie branched off and led the way directly across the intervening space towards the great fire that blazed up in the centre of the village. It was situated nearly half a mile north of the Klondike, and the settlement might easily have been passed unnoticed but for its arresting signal.

The King, apparently, had expected his visitors, and had taken due precaution to ensure their safe

arrival. It was too dark in the shadow of the timber to choose their steps further, so the expedition had no little trouble in negotiating the numerous impedimenta in their forest path. Fallen trees had to be reckoned with and more than one ravine had to be crossed, but at last the sleigh was pulled up within the zone of the fire's illumination.

Several Indians were grouped around the lurid flaming pile, at intervals heaping fresh logs thereon, and they evinced no surprise when the caravan came laboring up the slope and stopped abruptly in their midst.

A few seconds later Dave was unharnessed, then the weary members of the party crowded close to the fire and thawed the rigid icicles from their faces. The fire feeders had meanwhile, with sundry grunts of satisfaction, disappeared, but almost immediately a large concourse of youthful squaws came forward, and with many babbling cries of delight pressed near to welcome the newcomers. They evinced a particular interest in Archie, much to that youth's confusion, stroking his face and hands with such evident compassion that Stewart incontinently exploded with laughter. He ceased his boisterous merriment, however, when one or two of Archie's admirers diverted their attention to him, and subjected his lanky person to much critical inspection. Then one, braver than the rest, stretched out a timid hand and touched his nose, drawing back at once with a shrill scream of amusement; whereupon Stewart found his speech and scathingly rebuked the offending one for her forwardness and temerity.

"Can ye no' behave yersel'," he admonished

sternly. "Weel I ken that I'm good lookin', but — Noo, ye mustna tickle my pro-boscis. Haud aff, I tell ye! I'm feelin' vera tender aboot that nose. Mind I'll — I'll bite —— "

Then he opened his cavernous jaws with such direful malevolence that his dusky tormentors fled back in affright. Then it was Archie's turn to laugh, and Mac, Bill, and the Captain joined in heartily.

In the midst of their hilarious indulgence King James issued from a large and gorgeously ornamented tepee near by, and, with his tough old face wreathed in smiles, hastened to bid his visitors welcome.

"Glad is the heart of the King to see his pale-face friends, and glad are his people," he said quaintly, extending a hand to each in turn. But he beamed most winningly on Stewart. "Heap good cook squaw," he murmured reminiscently.

And now Archie happened to glance around, and to his exceeding surprise he noticed over a score of stalwart warriors standing expectantly in the background. They had not been there before, and for a moment the thought of treachery crossed the lad's mind. But the chief was quick to assure him; he had evidently observed Archie's glance of alarm.

"Young brave with the eagle eyes," he said with odd dignity, "fear not the Thron-Diuck warriors. Night and day they wait the coming of the yellow men, but the friends of the King are welcome in their eyes."

Feeling somewhat ashamed of his suspicions, Archie drew back to confer with Stewart and Bill as to the best camping ground on which to erect

their tent, for they had no wish to throw themselves altogether on the hospitality of the Indians even for one night, and, while these three were thus closely engaged, Mac and the Captain talked long and earnestly with the Indian chief. He told them that Soapy Sam's sledge had passed up the river soon after sunrise that morning, and he further intimated that a band of what he was pleased to call the yellow men had met Soapy and his companion some miles beyond the village, and accompanied them on their journey eastward. This much his watchful warriors had reported to him. It was not difficult to see that the King had no love for Soapy Sam.

"White man Soapy enemy of the Indians," he said simply. Clearly they had known each other of old.

"But what about Too-much-gold?" questioned Mac. "Does Soapy know where it is?"

The Indian shook his head craftily.

"Many times the cunning white man with the lynx's face has asked King James to tell him the Indians' secret," he remarked placidly, "but King James will only show you, Mis'r Mac — only." Here he gazed impressively at Mac. "You — hold — tight if yellow man come."

"Ay, I think we'll hold tight enough," grunted Mac.

"I'm afraid we're in for trouble," muttered the Captain. "It's plain enough the old chap knows we'll have to fight for the blessed creek."

"Anything that's worth havin' is worth fightin' for," said Mac oracularly. "Man, I mind the time when I would have dearly liked a scrimmage, but

we've got to remember, Captain, that the laddie must aye be kept as far as possible out o' danger ——"

"I know, old man, I know," interjected the Captain hastily, "but at the same time I think Archie will want to take his chances like the rest o' us. Don't let him know you're worrying about him, or he'll feel mighty bad, I can tell you ——"

"In the morning King James show you Too-much-gold," broke in the Indian, who had been growing impatient. "Heap big gold. Too-much-gold an' — Whar cook squaw?"

This last was a hasty and irrelevant query brought about by the absence of Stewart, who had gone off with Archie and Bill to erect the tent.

"Cook squaw come see you later," glibly and inaccurately said the Captain. "Come on, Mac, I think we've earned a rest to-night. Good night, King James!"

"Gud night!" responded the King. "Be sure send cook squaw." And he gazed disconsolately after the vanishing pair.

But though Stewart most emphatically refused to gratify the Indian's urgent desire for his presence, he was none the less touched by the implied compliment conveyed in the message.

"I wunner if he thinks I keep puddens in my pocket," grumbled he. Then a bright thought seized him. "Archie," he said, "would ye mind takin' over two or three o' them doughboys I made yesterday, and give them to Jamie wi' my compliments. Tell him — tell him I'm in-disposed."

And Archie went willingly.

Next morning, when the first gray streaks of dawn were beginning to appear, the hastily erected tent of King James's visitors came down with a rush, and in a trice was packed on the waiting sleigh.

"I'll go an' rush along old Leatherskin," said Stewart, when all was ready for a fresh start. "I hope he doesna mean to keep us waiting for an hour or twa."

But in truth the Indian must have been prepared for his trip even before they were, for his graceful equipage now came sweeping up to their dismantled camp, and in his accustomed seat, well wrapped in furs, King James sat, stolidly sucking at the pipe which Mac had given him, as if he had been engaged in the same operation for some time.

"Um!" he grunted. "You ready?"

Without waiting for a response, he flicked his long whip at the ear of the leader of his team, and off he sped.

"Let her buzz, boys," yelled Bill, "or we'll never catch up 'tween this an' Christmas."

"Buzz she does!" said Mac, gripping one of the ropes.

"Full steam ahead!" roared Stewart. "All aboard. Next stop Too-much-gold."

And with Dave barking, Stewart shouting, and the others lending an occasional whoop of mutual encouragement, they shot after their royal guide at an uncommonly rapid rate. Down to the main channel they followed him, then eastward along the icy trail they rushed, the frost showering in clouds of glittering spangles over their heads. For over an hour the King led a straight course along the

Klondike, then he struck off to the right at a slanting angle, and soon the white blistered ice of the river faded from view, while the blue glassy ridges to the south loomed ominously near.

"Surely he ain't goin' to take us over them icebergs!" breathed Bill hoarsely.

"Steady, boys, steady," cried Mac; and then they took a plunge into an awkward gully at a dangerous angle, their sleigh balancing for a moment or two on its runners as it wavered on the steep. They were now running directly into a mountain pass, around which enormous glaciers towered from many peaks.

And still the rapid pace was continued, while scarce a word was spoken by the striving men; then they found themselves slipping and skidding erratically over the dull, glassy bed of a massive icefield straddling a ridge immediately below the main ranges. But their guide stopped short of attempting to scale the great dividing chain, for which Archie for one was profoundly thankful; swerving farther to the left he dashed down a deep descent, whereon lay strewn huge blocks of detached ice and a glistening sea of rubble shed from the great shining fields overhead.

And lo! the Klondike channel again appeared. King James, with Indian astuteness, had taken a short cut along the mountains, so as to avoid the main river's winding track. Archie looked about him eagerly, but he saw nothing to warrant any outburst of enthusiasm. Everything looked so cold and drear. He began to wonder whether, after all, the Indian treasure existed only in the old chief's imagination. Suddenly the King's sleigh drew up

in the bed of a deep gulch which traced directly from an overhanging glacier. A colder-looking spot could not well have been imagined.

" It's aboot time ye had a blow, ye reckless auld ruffian," gasped Stewart. " D'ye think we're fleein' machines? "

The King, with deliberate slowness, descended from his perch and walked towards a part of the ice much blown and shelved, where the gully took a sharp bend in its course before entering on its straight run down to the Klondike.

" Surely," said Mac, approaching, his face showing his disappointment, " surely this isn't the creek you meant, Jamie? "

The Indian's visage at once became wreathed in smiles.

" Big gold here, Mis'r Mac," said he. " Too-much-gold."

" For any sake dinna sin your soul any mair! " interrupted Stewart solemnly. " It's the gold that lives in the rainbow we've been chasing, I'm think-in'."

Much dejected, they all gathered in the bed of the ambitiously named creek, and gazed at one another disconsolately. The quest of Too-much-gold had ended, but how differently from their hopes.

Still smiling, the King sought his seat among the furs, and prepared to depart, evidently mightily pleased with himself.

" Too-much-gold," he grunted, settling himself in position. " White man dig. He find big gold. Too-much-gold —— "

Apparently he had come to the limit of his vocabu-

lary in this direction, and without more ado he whipped up his dogs and departed by the same dangerous route as he had just come. Archie watched him until the sleigh, careering precariously, took the curve leading to the pass, and disappeared from sight; then he endeavored to comfort his companions.

"Perhaps if we got the tent fixed," said he with assumed cheerfulness. "we should feel better after a bit. Things always look dismal at the start."

"Blow me!" cried Bill, "you've got more backbone than any o' us! Come on, Stewart, an' let us rig up the happy home."

They departed forthwith to draw timber from the scraggy brushwood fringing the stream, and, while they were so engaged, Mac, Archie, and the Captain proceeded to examine more closely the nature of the presumed golden gully.

"After all," ventured Mac, after a minute's survey, "I shouldn't wonder if that big glacier had worn down quite a lot o' gold. Goodness knows what sort o' country is underneath it."

"It's the steepness of the channel that frightens me," said the Captain. "Nothing much of an under stratum could possibly form in such a place. Why, the creek must be a raging torrent in the spring, when the ice begins to melt."

"Well, that means we should have less work then, doesn't it," suggested Archie; "and even if the under stratum, as you call it, is not any thickness, still it may be nearly all solid gold, for the lighter sands are bound to be washed away."

Archie's engineering nature had asserted itself.

The theory of alluvial mining was already plain to him. On a comparatively flat surface, traversed by a more or less gentle current, the auriferous wash would be deep, and probably only of moderate value, and inversely, on the bed of a swift-flowing stream but a minimum of the substance carried down by the flood would be likely to find a resting-place, and this would of necessity be the heavier and naturally the more precious matter.

In a very short space their camp was erected and the stove glowing cheerfully therein; then, when they had thawed the icy sheathings of their faces, and infused some warmth into their chilled bodies, a more hopeful prospect of things presented itself to their minds.

"Maybe the glacier rests on a cap of gold," said Archie.

"Well, we can never hope to see it," returned Mac; "but it is vera possible that we may find some good specimens in the gully which have been washed down."

"We'll soon know a' aboot it," declared Stewart impressively; "and we'll go an' start work this vera meenit."

Preparations were made for sinking a shaft straightway. The gully was, roughly, about fifty feet wide, but its icy contents had contracted to within one-half of that distance, leaving a shelving margin of gravelly snow on either side. They decided to start operations on the western bank, and soon great fires were burning over the chosen side, and inch by inch the frozen silt was excavated. Without the fires their picks could make absolutely no

impression on the flinty sands, but after the burning embers of each blaze were cleared away it was found that the ground was rendered pliable for about a foot underneath. It was slow work, this fighting against Nature's allied forces, yet the men who undertook it were not easily daunted.

Now it was that Archie saw the wonderful strength of Mac and Stewart come into play. Their pickaxes rang incessantly, and very quickly a round, jagged pit was sunk, nearly five feet in depth. Then the Captain and Bill showed their skill. Seasoned miners they were too, and how they managed to accomplish so much in so short a time was most mystifying. But Archie also had his share of the labor; in fact, each member of the party did his utmost, whether it was in felling and drawing logs for the thawing fire or in wielding the shovel and pick. Slowly but surely the shaft descended, seeking for bedrock, and before the daylight failed it was sufficiently deep to make the raising of the mullock no easy task.

"I'm thinkin' we'll need to put up a win'lass, Mac," said Stewart, as he relieved his compatriot, and took what was intended to be the last shift of the evening.

"I scarcely think we'll have much farther to go," responded Mac. "Just try an' knock the bottom out o' the concern this time, and it will save us a lot o' trouble."

Stewart's lithe body swung itself out of sight immediately, and at once the sound of his ponderous blows rang out, showing that that worthy was doing his best to follow Mac's instructions to the letter.

"We'll start and drive across into mid-channel

to-morrow," said Mac to Archie. "We ought to strike bottom vera soon now."

Bill and the Captain had gone off on a final timber-hauling excursion, and these two were left alone to anticipate the wants of the striving worker below.

Thud, thud, thud, went the pickaxe, and the ice trembled with the repeated strokes, and dull, heavy echoes thundered along under the frozen mass. At length there came a splintering crash, followed by a hoarse bellow of mingled dismay and wonder from the toiler in the depths. Stewart had surely bottomed at last. With alacrity Mac sprang to the shaft mouth and dropped down beside his companion. Then there was silence, a silence so tense that Archie began to wonder what had happened. It was now almost quite dark; little more could be done that day. He marvelled what was keeping the doughty pair down in the frozen depths. Again noisy reverberations shook the crystal foundation on which he stood, but this time the sounds appeared to originate far below and in the middle of the channel. A few minutes passed, then the vague echoes of much worthy discussion rumbled up to his ears. At the same time the log-cutters returned with their loads.

"Hallo, Archie," cried Bill, "what has become o' the population?"

Before the youth could frame a reply, Stewart popped his head into the gloom, and beckoned him mysteriously. Wonderingly he sought the shaft mouth and wriggled down between the flinty walls. His surprise was great when he felt his feet seized from below and guided sideways through a narrow aperture leading from the bottom of the cavity

towards the centre of the stream. A second or so later he was blinking in incredulous amazement at a most wonderful spectacle. He stood in a veritable Aladdin's cavern of beauty. A lighted stump of candle stuck on the hard black floorway reflected on a crystal dome above, so that it sparkled and gleamed with a hundred varying hues. A perfect arc it formed, with curving walls sending out flashes of fiery radiance, and ever shimmering with kaleidoscopic splendor. High overhead the glittering roof arose, and lo! as Archie looked, he could discern a yet unfrozen fluid bubbling on through the heart of the splendid mass, seething and sparkling, yet never a sound he heard.

A cry of admiration burst from his lips. No picture ever conjured, even by the authors of the entrancing *Arabian Nights*, could have equalled in gorgeous magnificence this weirdly beautiful icy vault. The solid contents of the Indian's creek had contracted away from its original bed, creating in truth a dazzling vision of beauty. For the space of a minute the youth had no eyes for aught save the marvellous scene, then with a start he recalled his wandering fancy and took note of his two companions, who were seated unconcernedly on the ground before him, and examining by the candle flame several rusty-looking pebbles that were heaped beside them.

Stewart broke the stillness.

"I tell ye they are ironstane, Mac," he said in a tone of conviction. "Hoo can ye no' be sociable an' agree wi' my good judgment?"

"Because your judgment is vera much in error,

"GOLD!" HOWLED STEWART, LEAPING TO HIS FEET IN AN ECSTASY OF DELIGHT

my man," grunted Mac with calm assurance, balancing one of the pebbles in his hand with elaborate care. " An' if you want to know the reason for my being so sure, I may say it all hinges on the question o' specific gravity."

" Oh, does it? " murmured Stewart; " I am vera much enlightened. Knowledge is a gran' thing, Mac; noo I mind when I was up in the Arctic — Come in Archie, come awa' in an' dinna stand shiverin' at the door. I'm jist goin' to hae an argument on metapheesical questions wi' Mac. Have a look at them bitties o' iron while I heave ane or twa chunks o' wisdom at his head."

" You misguided gomeril, they're not iron," broke in Mac with a strange laugh. " What do you say, Archie? "

With fingers that trembled in spite of himself the lad picked up one of the muddy-looking pieces and carefully poised it in his hand, even as Mac had done. Then he examined its oddly-irregular surface keenly, and tested it with his thumb nail, and Mac eyed him curiously the while.

" The covering is an iron-sand cement," he said in a strained voice, " but the kernel is —— "

Here he held the subject of discussion over the candle, and — the iron-brown sheath cracked, disintegrated, and fell in a shower of fine dust particles, leaving a glimmering core of a rich yellow hue.

" Gold! " howled Stewart, leaping to his feet in an ecstasy of delight.

" Ay, gold, you doubtin' Pharisee! " murmured Mac. " Archie's process made no mistake that time."

"'An' you kent a' aboot it, ye — ye hippopotamus!" complained Stewart feelingly.

"I wanted you to get an ocular demonstration o' one o' the great laws o' Nature," said Mac slowly; "namely the law dealing with the expansion o' metals."

He rose and made one stride over to Archie, who was gazing with blurred eyes at the piece of metal which the world prized so dearly.

"And further," his voice rang out strongly, as he laid a kindly hand on the young man's shoulder, "I wanted our youngest partner to be the first to see the virgin gold that means so much to him, so little to us. Archie, my laddie, the gold which the Indian promised is all around you. Too-much-gold Creek may never, I hope, justify its title with us; the vera name is a reproach to the white man's rapacity. But it gladdens me to know that, Process or no Process, you will go home with all you desire in the shape of wealth, wealth clean and unsullied, costing no man's agony, no man's loss. Untainted you will take it, laddie, an' may the good Lord bless its use in your hands. My share is yours if need be."

"An' mine," echoed Stewart simply.

Archie's eyes were moist as he convulsively gripped the hands of his staunch comrades. Who can blame him that his thoughts had in that brief interval flown back to his patient mother, the striving brother in the far-away homeland, and that his heart was filled with unutterable emotion and gratitude?

"It should be the other way about," said he, smiling faintly. "You should both get part of my share."

"Ye tender innocent," chuckled Stewart; "d'ye think Mac or me care for the stuff? Why, we wouldna be able to live if we had naething mair to chase after. Like the man in the joggraphy book, oor occupation would have melted, skedaddled, vanished, leaving twa vera meeserable objects to pine and dee."

"Whar in the howlin' blazes are ye hidin', boys?" came Bill's familiar voice behind them. "The Captain is crowdin' down on top o' me, an' I'm blowed if I can see whar you've got to."

But his feet at that moment found the aperture, and with many involuntary exclamations of surprise he shot into view and became quiescent on the instant out of sheer amazement at the scene he witnessed.

The Captain's unceremonious entry took place within a short second or so later, and when both had sufficiently recovered themselves their language was vague and unintelligible.

"There's something here that'll mak' ye gasp," quoth Stewart, displaying the pile of earthy-looking fragments he had collected.

"Huh!" snorted Bill; "you don't get me that way; I ain't color blind."

"How did you manage to tumble into this — refrigerator?" asked the Captain, still staring about him in bewilderment.

"Just as you say, Cap'n," blandly returned Stewart. "I tumbled in, feet first, same as you did. The sand caved in a' of a sudden, an' of course I had to go wi' it."

"We've hit bedrock on Too-much-gold, lads,"

said Mac, in a voice from which all feeling seemed to have departed. "Watch the metamorphosis o' the despised pieces o' rock which you see beside us."

He repeated the test which Archie had made, with a like extraordinary result. The Captain was thunderstruck.

"I want to whoop, boys," said he. "I wonder if the roof would stand it."

"Well, I'm — I'm jiggered," burst out Bill feebly, clutching at the gleaming nugget as if he feared it might prove a mirage and as speedily fade away. "Is — is there more o' them?"

"Ay, man," grinned Stewart. "They're stickin' up on the surface like — like apples in an orchard — when — when they have been shook doon of course."

Each of the specimens obtained was submitted to a similar process, and all passed from the fire yellow and glowing. Then they made a brief survey of the glassy tunnel, and here and there peeped a well-waterworn fragment of the precious metal, though scarcely distinguishable from the dull-brown bed on which it lay.

"This beats the days o' forty-nine, I reckon," murmured Bill in awe.

"Let us give a cheer, boys," suggested the Captain. "We don't every day run against a fortune like this."

"Yes, a cheer for King James!" cried Archie with enthusiasm. "King James and Too-much-gold!"

"King James and Too-much-gold!" they shouted in unison; "Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

And the strange cavern echoed and re-echoed with their tumultuous acclamation, and the crystal roof

trembled and gave back the refrain, so that it rolled like thunder along the frostbound gorge.

"King James and Too-much-gold! Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

For several days after their noted discovery they continued their peaceful occupation of the Indian Creek, diligently excavating the frozen gravel and selecting thereform the cunningly disguised treasure. It was soon found that the wash dirt was but a few inches in thickness around the vicinity where the shaft had penetrated, but this was of such wonderful richness that in a short time quite a hoard of the brownish-looking pebbles were obtained and carefully stored away. Of fine gold there was but little, or rather it was not discernible amidst the coarser nodules, and as water could not be available for sluicing until the spring, no one troubled about its probable presence.

Mac, however, was convinced that Too-much-gold Creek's riches lay wholly in its visible supply; but as that promised to be ample for all, there was no need to worry about future contingencies.

It was on the fourth day after their arrival that it was considered necessary to sink a second shaft to tap the auriferous drifts some few yards farther up stream. Their operations so far had been restricted to the small area near to the point of entry. The stifling nature of the atmosphere prevented them from moving farther afield until another inlet was made to allow of the free passage of air.

"The nearer the glacier the coarser the gold," said Mac.

"But," reasoned Archie, "if we sunk down below

instead, and on the bend of the stream, we should be more likely to get the accumulated wash which must have been piling up for years and years."

"Kerect, young man," said Bill, "but we'd have to dig out a mighty lot o' stuff to get the gold, which would mean building fires under the ice —— "

"Which would pretty well drown us," interpolated the Captain, "or bring the ice down on top o' us. No, Archie, my boy, you're right enough about the bend of the creek being probably the richest part, but we can't touch it until summer —— "

"When we won't be here," put in Stewart dolefully.

"It seems to me," said Archie thoughtfully, "that the summer wouldn't help us much, because then the whole side of the hill will be flooded with melting glaciers."

"You've hit it, laddie," agreed Mac. "At no time in the year will it be possible to work out the great riches o' Too-much-gold. We must e'en take what Nature has displayed before our eyes, but I think that will be enough for a' oor needs — if we get leave to work it out in peace."

Finally they decided to put down the new shaft about twenty yards up channel, and on the opposite bank, as here a more open space offered for the work to be carried on. One day sufficed for the accomplishment of their task, even as it had done in the initial instance, and unerringly they bottomed on the same golden deposit, which by this time they knew so well.

That night King James paid them a visit, and was accorded a right hearty welcome.

" You find big gold? King James speak good? " said he, grinning expansively.

" Big gold! Heap plenty gold! Too-much-gold! " responded Stewart with cheerful emphasis.

The Indian nodded, as if such matters were of small moment, then his face clouded, and he came to the real purpose of his mission.

" Yellow men want big gold," he said earnestly. " White squaw Soapy, he come look, no find trail, but see smoke. He come wi' yellow dogs soon."

Much circuitous enquiry revealed the text of the old chief's trouble on their behalf. It appeared that King James had led them to the creek by the dangerous mountain route mainly for the object of preventing the sleigh tracks from being easily followed, but now he had discovered that some of the alien people whom he disliked so cordially had actually been in the vicinity for the last two days, and had apparently been successful in locating the whereabouts of Too-much-gold Creek. It was needless to ask how the Indian had arrived at this knowledge. Doubtless his warrior scouts, ever on the alert, had brought him the disturbing information. His own personal fear in the matter, as Archie shrewdly guessed, was that the enemy would not stop at taking possession of the creek, but would most likely promptly raid the Indian village for supplies, as had evidently been their custom in former years, even when the Thron-Diucks were camped on the shores of the Yukon.

" You make ready," entreated the old man " Build hut, tent no good; make big fight."

" He seems so all-fired sure o' the skunks comin',

I reckon it would be a fair thing if we made preparations," remarked Bill meaningly.

"Which we'll start and do the first thing in the morning," agreed Mac. "King James hasn't deceived us yet, and he means well."

He reached for his ponderous breechloader, and inspected it significantly.

"All the same," said the Captain gravely, "if we get besieged by two or three dozen o' the beggars, I don't exactly see how we can make much of a fight. Their numbers would swamp us ——"

"You're aye findin' deeficulties, Cap'n," grumbled Stewart. "I tell ye we're no goin' to gie up Too-much-gold, though they come in their hunners o' thoosan's."

"Hear, hear!" applauded Bill.

Archie said nothing. He could easily see the force of the Captain's statement, yet his nature was not one to agree to a tame submission, even in the face of great odds, and he knew, too, that the Captain would be about the last man to advocate such a policy when it came to be determined.

Next morning, instead of descending the shaft they had completed, they set to work to build a hut.

"Suppose we place it on top o' the new shaft," suggested Mac. "It would at least hide the fresh workings."

The idea was at once seized upon, and before that day was over, the rude logged erection was finished, the floor being composed of movable beams to permit of entry to the underground. Loopholes were made here and there, commanding a view to every

point of the compass, though attack was likely to be made only from the Klondike.

" I'm glad they've given us time to finish the job," said Mac, gazing with satisfaction at their stronghold. " Now, I think, we're ready to receive visitors."

Weary with their unwonted toil they retired early to rest, and soon all were fast asleep — all except Archie; and his mind was too much filled with conflicting thoughts to let him succumb easily to the soft influence. His active brain refused to be at peace. He was not yet hardened into the wild life he was leading. Near him slumbered Mac, undisturbed in his dreams as he was in his waking hours.

" Nothing seems to affect him," thought the lad with an unconscious sigh.

Beside the still-glowing stove Stewart, recumbent, betrayed his presence in most audible fashion. It was plain enough that that valiant gentleman's visions were in no wise perturbed by the threatening untoward events. In the far corner of the hut Bill and the Captain lay, restful and calm.

" How soundly they all sleep! " said Archie to himself.

About midnight, Dave, who was reclining at his feet, stirred, and gave vent to a warning murmur, deep and low, and before Archie could realize it his comrades were aroused and alert, with their weapons ready gripped.

" Don't wake the laddie," whispered Mac. " I'll go out and investigate. Dave never growls without reason."

Archie was beside him in an instant, his Winchester in his hand.

" Let me go! " he said anxiously.

Again Dave growled, this time long and hoarsely, finishing up in a short, sharp, challenging bark, as he leaped against the barricaded doorway.

Mac pushed back the ponderous logs, and he and Archie stepped out into the moonlight. They caught a glimpse of two dark figures speeding down the gully away from the vacant shaft on the far bank. Then Archie gripped Dave as he was bounding off in pursuit.

" They'd shoot you, doggie," said he.

" No, we cannot afford to lose Dave," spoke Mac sternly; " but I'm much tempted to ask you to try a long shot after the miserable thieves. My gun wouldna carry the distance."

Without a word Archie raised his rifle, but before he could get a sight his strange companion pressed down the deadly tube.

" You would get your mark, my lad," said he; " your nerves are too steady to allow you to miss. I wouldn't have you shed first blood. Let them go."

Calmly they returned to their rest, and, with scarce a question, their awaiting comrades rolled back into their blankets.

They were up betimes in the morning, and had breakfast over before daylight; then they deliberated on their best plan of action. Stewart was in favor of the ordinary work of mining being resumed without more delay, but Mac and the Captain were of opinion that the forenoon should be given over to watching for the marauders who had given such conclusive proof of their presence in the vicinity.

" You're makin' a lot oot o' a trifle," grunted Stewart. " Do ye actually think a wheen Chinamen will risk tacklin' us? They'll hae mair respect for their skins, I'm thinkin' —— "

A succession of barks from Dave drowned his flow of speech, but he rushed outside with the rest, still talking; then his voice failed him, and he gazed open-mouthed at what he saw. In truth, action was in all temporarily paralyzed at the curious sight they witnessed. Archie broke the spell.

" It's the threatened invasion at last," he said grimly, gripping his rifle tighter.

There was certainly considerable reason for their amazement. Approaching towards them up the creek a huge caravanlike structure, mounted on great sleigh runners, was making deliberate progress; yet no sign of human life was there, no dogs strained at the moving load, nor was there any visible evidence to show why it moved at all. Apparently the Brobdingnagian contrivance had been built of rough, unhewn logs alone; but that fact did not arouse the interest of the beholders. They were more puzzled to know what constituted its motive power, and considerably exercised to devise a means of stopping its advance. Quickly the mystifying object drew near, and before they could decide how to act it had halted with a jerk directly over the old shaft mouth. Then did they realize that the mammoth enclosed sleigh was nothing more nor less than a hut filled with people, and too late they grasped the simple mode of propulsion employed.

" Get off that thar shaft," roared Bill, levelling his

rifle at the travelling fort, "or we'll blow your blasted pig house into blazes!"

"Ready, lads," cried Mac, and at once they covered the bulky edifice with their guns, though it did not seem to Archie as if they could do much damage to such a ponderous structure.

Then a tantalizing voice spoke out from behind the barricade:

"Shoot an' be blowed to you! You can't hurt this hyer domicile more'n a crowd o' muskitties; an' anyhow we're law-abiding citizens, an' we claim this property by the right o' possession, savvy?"

"Well, I'll be — kicked!" ejaculated Bill.

"Ye see, boys," explained the speaker, who was none other than Soapy Sam, gaining confidence enough to step out from behind the fortification, "we've heard that Major Walsh, the Governor, is camped down at Big Salmon, and though that leetle spot is a fair-sized distance from Too-much-gold, we want to be right wi' the law in case o' accident. We're camped on the shaft, an' you ain't. We've roped in an abandoned shaft; that's what we've done; an' if ye shoot, we, as peaceable citizens, will be tearfully compelled to report you to the Major. He don't like desp'rit galoots that use shootin' irons, he don't."

To say that the original holders of the creek were astounded by this calm statement would be but mildly expressive of the nature of their feelings. The cool audacity of the man was too much for them, and they gasped in amazement. Not wishing to risk a fight, the invaders had nevertheless actually taken possession, and by the most simple stratagem imaginable.

"And did you work this grand idea out all by yourself?" asked Mac sarcastically. "Isn't there another grovelling hog in the conspiracy apart from the yellow scum ——"

"I've a mind to come out an' drill daylight into your carcass," snarled the familiar tones of Chilcoot Charlie from within.

"Not much fear o' that," retorted Mac, with a grim laugh. "You know best where you're safest ——"

"You'd better git, like peaceable galoots," entreated Soapy Sam suavely. "I ain't goin' to quarrel wi' you over a question o' right, and for that part you can't shift us if you try a month."

"Look here, Soapy, my man," enjoined Stewart persuasively, "you're a meeserable sort o' object wi' a gory reputation. I'm only a puir innocent, ignorant o' a' the wiles o' this wicked world, but so that we may avoid wholesale slaughter, I'll sacrifice mysel' an' fight you for possession o' Too-much-gold ——"

"No, you don't, old man," interrupted Soapy hurriedly, albeit a dangerous gleam appeared in his eye. "You an' me will hev a scrimmage some other day," he continued cautiously. "Meantime the caravan is goin' to anchor ex-actly whar it is, an' you can bet your life it's goin' to stay."

Somewhat nonplussed by the strange position of affairs, Mac and his companions retired tentatively back to their hut to hold further council together, and, immediately they had turned their backs, over a dozen yellow-skinned creatures, half-Indian, half-Chinamen in appearance, swarmed out on the ice and made fast stout ropes from their stronghold to

the tree stumps on the bank. Before the pioneers had reached their door the odd edifice was moored into position as if it had been in the same spot for years. Thus had Soapy Sam, by subtle manœuvre, outwitted the creek defenders.

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CHAPTER XII

THE VILLAGE OF THE DEAD

LONG and earnestly the surprised and disappointed five considered their anxious position without coming to any satisfactory decision, and the day wore on and drew to a close leaving them still puzzling over their difficulty. Meanwhile the usurpers of the creek had made themselves very much at home, and their noisy rejoicings served all the more to irritate the men who had been so craftily taken at a disadvantage.

"Well, boys," said the Captain suddenly during the evening, "it appears to me that there are only two things we can do in the matter, and, personally, I am reluctantly forced to favor the first."

"Suppose you let us know what they are," suggested Bill. "I reckon we might screw up a heap more intelligent interest in them if we were in the dark secret."

"He means," said Mac, "that we can sit tight where we are and fight, or otherwise depart in peace into the mountains."

"What?" bellowed Stewart indignantly. "Do I act-ually hear Mac tak' into serious conseederation the policy o' flight?"

"Sit down and thaw yoursel', my man. I was only guessing at the Captain's ideas, an' I certainly

agree with him that there are only two methods o' procedure open to us at this vera unfortunate time."

"I plump for fight," grunted the fiery Kentuckian.

"Maist de-cidedly," concurred Stewart. "Are we to run awa' from some greasy Mongolians? As for freend Soapy, I'll eat him if ever I get my hands on his slippery carcass ——"

"What do you say, Archie?" the Captain asked, interrupting Stewart's flow of eloquence.

"I don't like the idea of submitting tamely to these people stealing our ground, but can we do anything to help ourselves? Are we strong enough to put up a fight with any chance of success? They are in possession now; how can we dislodge them?"

"Stewart might mak' a pudding and ask them to dine with us," suggested Mac; but the innuendo was lost on his war-inclined comrade, who at that moment was loading the chambers of his revolvers.

"How about a counter attack?" enquired Archie. "If we could find the village where these Mongolians come from we might create a diversion which would draw them away from our ground to defend it, and then we might deal with Soapy Sam and the rest of his gang."

"Now you are talking, Archie," said the Captain. "It might be a good plan to shift the field of battle to the enemy's country."

"There's still a small matter in my mind that wants some clearing up," put in Mac, "and that is in connection with Archie's presence here in this beautiful sunlit valley. What has Soapy done with the patent gold extractor he stole in Seattle? Where

has he hidden it? And if it is in this country, why is it here unless Monkey Brand knew o' something refractory in this district before the rush broke out? "

"Of course he did," growled Bill. "Soapy Sam knew this country years ago. He wasn't too well pleased when the rush broke out, for with these half-caste Chinamen, or Irkutzes, or whatever the beggars call themselves, he could have run the biggest mining concern in the gol'-dashed globe."

"Ah well," commented the Captain, "he has probably arranged some scheme for getting even again! All the same, if we had known the Yukon would be open from St. Michael's we might have saved ourselves a journey that may yet become historical. As for his getting the whip hand of this outfit, that is a point which has yet to be settled. Hullo! What's the matter? Who is outside? "

"Just what I was tellin' Stewart," said Mac quickly, winking mysteriously at his comrades. "The laws o' hydrostatics and dynamics, not to mention those of the Medes and the Persians, or that o' gravitation, are unalterable, and, according to them, it is a physical impossibility for these overhanging, glacier-capped ridges to carry alluvial gold —— "

"What are ye bletherin' about now? " Stewart broke in; but seeing Mac slipping outside, he quickly resumed, as if in continuation of his original remark. "Ye ken, or should ken well enough, boys, that whales and polar bears dinna flourish exceedingly weel near the Equator. Noo, I mind when I was up at the North Pole — Ah! ye canna run awa' this time, ye deevils —— "

" Sling out the yarn then," growled Kentucky Bill. " We may as well squirm with it as with Mac's story of the sea serpent." Bill stopped. He was not accustomed to sustaining a conversation. But Stewart came to the rescue with a grin of fiendish joy.

" Weel, ye dinna ken anything about Mac's sea serpent," he remarked, " but I can tell ye that that North Pole was a fine piece o' work. It rose straight oot o' the ice for an awfu height, and at its top was —— "

" The Stars and Stripes," said Bill, who was nothing if not patriotic.

" Am I the man wha was there or you? " demanded the veracious raconteur savagely, yet withal having a twinkle in his eye which showed his anger was assumed.

" I saw the blamed Pole when it was on show down at Judge O'Malley's place in Kentucky, and I'll go nap it had the Stars and Stripes tacked on its bald head then."

" Don't quarrel, boys," the Captain intervened. " I suppose it supported the Union Jack when you saw it at home, Stewart? "

" No, the flag was frozen, and I couldna see whether it bore a Chinese or an Auchtermuchty coat o' arms. But I saw a tam o' shanter sitting on the top, and a bonnie wee polar bear was climbing up to steal it, and when we cut it doon — the pole I mean, we were needin' firewood at the time — we saw it was only a cheap thing after all, for it had a made-in-Germany trade mark. However it burned weel and gave out such a heat that the ice was melted for hundreds o' miles around, and the wee

whales came up and had swimming matches micht no' believe it, but these whales soon tame that they would come up and lick my when I whistled on them. Ane wee bonnie used to wag its tail at me in a way I though strange until I discovered it was actually w out signals to me in the telegraphic lan After that we used to hae long talks togeth I was a first-class telegraphist then, althou micht not think so. When the warm weather on I often jumped on the back o' this whal got a grand shower bath, and one day — an day — " Stewart paused to ponder over the of that day, and Kentucky Bill asked sarcast

" Well, are you played out already? happened that day? "

" And one day," repeated Stewart; " we –

A yell resounded outside the hut, and th sprang to their feet and seized their weapons.

" As I was saying," went on Stewart, suddenly received another inspiration. But no further; the door opened and Mac ca carrying a struggling bundle of ice-encruste manity in his arms, which, when set down the fire, resolved itself into a weird-looking man.

" You've told enough lies for the night, Ste Mac said. " Even this poor misguided couldn't stand any more. I'll not say, thoug that had your imagination failed you, or tongue got tired, he might have suspected t knew he was sneaking around our domicile."

" He is one of Soapy's gang of half-caste

Captain said, " and looks as if a square meal would do him a lot of good."

The prisoner was certainly a strange type of man. He had some of the peculiar features of the Mongolian, yet did not seem to be one of that nomadic people who had crossed into Alaska by way of the Behring Strait.

Suddenly he spoke, and all at once recognized his nationality.

" Me no come watchy you," the creature whined. " Me vely hungly. Tink stlait white man givey chlistian some floul, ol beans, ol lice."

" The nigger is a Chinaman! " Stewart exclaimed.

" You bet, no half-caste 'bout me. Me belongy Hong-Kong. Me Blitish, and me vely hungly."

" Well I'll be frozen wi' the sun! " ejaculated Kentucky Bill; " I knew Britain had a fairly wide grip on this here world, but I'm blowed if ever I knew she had swung her stakes round China."

" Here, you ugly sinner," spoke Stewart, handing the man a dish of beans. " I didna ken that Soapy starved his gang of cutthroats."

" The ugly sinner " took the beans and devoured them greedily. Evidently he really was hungry. He looked at Stewart when he had emptied the dish. " Me likey Scotchy man," he said; " my wold! Me wish Quong Talt was Scotchy. He tink it best countly he evel see —— "

" What! you yellow-skinned barbarian! " roared Mac; " would you take the name of Scotland into your sinful mouth? "

" My wold. Me takey anyting in mouth now. Me hungly —— "

" Look here," said the Captain abruptly; " where did you come from just now? Are you a member of Soapy Sam's gang or not? "

" Oh no, me cooky on big steamel come up flom Amelica wif' lot gold diggels. Me tink me get bettel job up hele so me cleal out of steamel and comey up wif two tlee white fellows. But me no likey bad men wif face like me but no pigtail, who come alonga white men down livel 'bout a hundled miles and take away white boss's joss. So me cleal out aftel stealy evelyting me can. By and by me gety upy Dawson but minels catchy me stealy floul, and, my wold! they leady to hang me upy when me get away. That was yestelday, and to-night me gety up hele. Me looky into hut on othel side of cleek, and, my wold! me looky stlaight at same men me cleal out flom, an lot of no-good, no-pigtail half-Chinamen, half-Indian fellows who tooky joss away befole. My wold! me leave pletty quick, you bet, and come ovel hele. But me no savvy youl talky talky and no' know that you Blitish and 'Melican until big Scotchy man catchy me. My wold ! talky talky muchy muchy make plenty hungly."

" Here's some mair beans for ye," grunted Stewart; " but don't bolt them in a moothfu' as ye did the last lot I gave ye. If ye're vera hungry, fill yorsel' wi' some sawdust first; beans are far ower expensive up here to waste on a Chinaman, and the dog hasna — whaur's the dog? Has onybody seen the dog? "

" And where is Archie? " cried the Captain anxiously looking round. " He has been out since you brought in this fellow, Mac."

Alarm was shown upon every man's face. Archie and the dog had disappeared.

"This is what comes of listening to people telling fairy tales," said Kentucky Bill, looking threateningly at Stewart. "What with havin' to hear your silly yarn, and then gettin' the Chinkie's thrown at us, we've allowed the boy and the dog to fall into Soapy's hands."

Stewart did not answer. He drew his knife and moved towards the door. "I'll squelch every heathen among them if there's a hair o' his heid harmed," he muttered savagely, and his looks at that moment gave promise that he could certainly account for more than one opponent.

The Captain and Bill clutched their rifles and silently prepared to follow, when Mac broke out. "Have you all taken leave o' your senses?" he demanded; "do you think the laddie can't look after himsel'? Supposing he had been collared by Soapy's gang, and couldn't get a shot fired to let us know, the dog wouldn't hold his tongue ——"

"Mac," wailed Stewart, "ye ken as weel as me that the laddie is valuable to that man o' iniquity. It's no like you to sit still an' argue when there's ony chance o' him being in a fix."

"I'm comin', Stewart, I'm comin'," interrupted Mac, seizing his blunderbuss; "but I've a question to ask the Emperor o' China first. Look here, you savvy me, you guileless chunk o' misery?"

"Me savvy you plenty good," the Celestial responded as the others left the hut. "Wha' you wanty say?"

"What was the white man's joss like that your half-caste brethren took away?"

"He plenty heavy. He live in box wif plenty wires, and have Glasgo' sticky all ovel him. Me tly to stealy him, but him too heavy. Him vely good joss Soapy fellows say ——"

"The good Lord be praised!" muttered Mac devoutly, then, addressing the Chinaman once more, he asked: "Did your half-caste friends steal the joss, or was it given to them?"

"Oh, him given to them to take to whele they stay! White man Soapy he follow them aftelwalds ——"

"Help yourself to beans, then, you relic o' the world's oldest civilization. I'm going after the others." Mac rushed out into the silent night, and ran over the crumbling ice towards their old shaft, over which Soapy Sam's portable hut now rested. He overtook his comrades, who were travelling cautiously so as not to alarm the occupants of the enemies' camp, and together the quartette steered to the oblong shape looming ahead, the indistinct nature of which was only intensified by the streaks of light that shone through the roughly fitting logs. But they did not go all the way. They became conscious suddenly that Dave was with them, and while they paused to wonder whence he came, a slight shivering figure advanced from the shadows of Soapy's hut.

"Archie," Mac cried in a low voice, "how could you be so foolish? We came prepared to turn this frozen-water channel into a field o' battle, for the boys felt sure Soapy had got you ——"

" No, Mac, he hasn't, but I've found out where these strange Siberian people have their settlement, and I think we should pay it a visit."

" And we've found out where your stolen patent is, my laddie, and, with Providence remaining neutral, we'll have it before we're much older."

" Let's get back to the stove at once, boys, or our noses and ears will be frozen off," put in the Captain. " We've all come out without any protection."

" I never thought of that," Archie said, " I've lost all feeling in my fingers and toes already. But I overheard Soapy Sam and his satellites quarrelling, and I am sure there will be trouble between Chilcoot Charlie and that big hulking Siberian leader soon. The Asiatic is complaining that Soapy hasn't provided the cases of firewater he promised, and Chilcoot Charlie is urging him to make a raid on Dawson to steal all the stores in the place. Soapy Sam didn't seem to like their interfering with his business as the head of the gang, but he couldn't bully them in the slightest, and I fear they will openly attack us at daylight. Incidentally I learned that his Mongolian followers have a village or settlement near the head of the Klondike River."

" And in that village we'll find Ralstons' Patent," said Mac. " It was the white man's joss the Chinaman told us about. It is a big box with a lot of wires inside, and, as the heathen noticed, still has the Glasgow to Liverpool labels o' the Caledonian Railway Company pasted all over it."

They had now reached their hut, the door of which was still standing open, but quickly closed as they gained the inside.

"Whaur is Hong-Kong?" bellowed Stewart next moment, and every one at once remembered that they had left a Chinaman in their house, and realized that he had disappeared.

"Poor beggar," said the Captain, "he'll die before morning! The temperature is down to sixty below."

"He's got skeered, I guess," remarked Bill. "I reckon he thought Stewart would tell us more about his pet whales ——"

But Stewart now set up a howl of deep anguish. "Whaur's the beans I had ready for the mornin's breakfast?" he cried.

"Puzzle, find the Chinaman," laughed the Kentuckian.

"My man, it's nae laughin' matter, as ye'll find oot when ye gang withoot yer breakfast to-morrow," reprimanded Stewart, "an' I'm as hungry as if I hadna had any beans for a week noo. The ungrateful yellow effigy!"

"Try some sawdust, Stewart," the Captain advised; "I think I heard you say it was very filling."

"Ay, for dolls. Ah! I've got an idea. Here, Dave, smell that plate, that's the scent of a Chinaman. Catch him, that's a good dog. He's got your breakfast as well as ours."

Dave barked his readiness to undertake the pursuit of the bean stealer, but Archie interfered. "Surely you don't grudge the poor wretch a few beans, Stewart," he said reproachfully. "Even Soapy Sam might not do that."

"Man, Stewart, ye are gettin' sadly deficient in foresight of late, an' I am really much troubled about

what's to become o' you," added Mac. "Do you not see that if Quong Tart had waited, we should have had to keep him, and it is not a handfu' o' beans that would have done that. Besides, I can tell you, he deserves a lot more than he has stolen, for he has put us on the track o' Archie's patent. It's in the village o' the Mongolians."

"And we are starting for that spot at daylight," chimed in Kentucky Bill. "We can hide the most of our stores and travel light."

"By Jupiter, you're right that time, Bill!" agreed the Captain. "We'll turn the tables on Soapy by attacking him where he'll likely feel it most. And won't it be rough on Samuel if he has merely carted Ralstons' Patent up here for our benefit?"

"Hurrah for the patent then!" cried Kentucky Bill. "Blow me if I don't call myself a patent restorer when I get back to civilized parts again."

"You've missed a word, Bill," Mac laughed. "Is it the restorer that's the patent, or the patent the restorer?"

"It will be a patent hair restorer, I guess," returned the American good-naturedly, "if I have first to take some one's scalp."

"I'll no quarrel wi' ye, Bill," Mac replied. "All the same, when it comes to taking scalps, I'll no' allow that any man is better than myself at that work."

"Never mind that question just now, boys," the Captain put in. "Let us hustle and get packed up for a move. Soapy will think he has frightened us off, but, by Jupiter! we'll get square with him yet."

" Shouldn't we go over and say goodbye to him? " suggested Archie. " We can pretend that the shaft he jumped was of no use to us, and wish him luck. As a matter of fact the law — if there were any — would be on his side if we tried to drive him off by force."

" We'll just be as peaceably inclined as he and his scrapings of humanity are," murmured Stewart, gazing lovingly at his shining knife blade, " but I canna help the sinfu' idea growin' upon me that I would like to meet Soapy, in a friendly sort o' way, near a big hole in the ice; the population is needin' thinnin' in this Klondike country."

" Well, is it resolved that we play him at his own game? " the Captain inquired; " and incidentally that we visit the Mongolian village? "

" It is," answered Kentucky Bill. " Maybe there's good gold up this gulch anyway, and I guess we can rush Soapy easily if we want to when we get back that patent gold extractor."

No more was said, and with a will the men set to work to pack the smaller sleigh with the estimated requirements for the journey. This was soon arranged, and then the remaining provisions and utensils were lowered through the floor into the shaft. Rough-sawn boards were fitted into position near the mouth, and when all was made secure the hard earth was filled in and hammered and danced upon until no one could have detected any difference between the covered shaft and the rest of the floor, even had the hut been burned down. Archie took careful measurements of the exact spot where the shaft lay, and then all lay down round the red-hot stove to sleep until morning.

They were astir at eight o'clock, and, in the hours of darkness which followed before the feeble sun sent its rays down into the bleak gullies, the blankets were added to the sleigh and a breakfast of beans and bacon prepared, the gold they had already won from the frostbound gravel also being packed away securely.

Just at daylight, as they were about ready to start, Soapy Sam strolled over from the other camp and looked on interestedly at the final preparations.

"Got a sudden call to see friends?" he grinned, nodding his head towards the packed sleigh.

"No; we don't like the crowded life o' this place, and we're going out for a picnic into the country," Mac answered. "Would you like to come? We can guarantee plenty o' fishing and a good appetite."

"I guess I'm not taking on any just now, old man. I'm going to plunk in straight where we are camped, and try to tickle the ground into giving up a few nuggets. I'm a peaceable sort o' cuss, and if I could only get as much gold as might buy a railroad or two, I guess I would retire from active business. They say this sort o' life is bad for the nerves, and I shouldn't like to make a galoot pass in his ticket with his beauty spoiled if I aimed at some other part of his carcass."

"Ay, ye're richt there, Soapy," chimed in Stewart. "I'm nervous mysel' at times, but I always use the knife then. Noo, isn't that a bonny bit o' stuff? Wouldn't it be a rael pleasure to hae your ribs tickled wi' that?" He pushed his long glittering steel blade under Soapy Sam's nose and smiled insinuatingly. "There's naebody inside the hut noo," he continued

in his most alluring tones. " Will ye no' come in, and we'll lock the door, and hae a rael wee carving picnic o' our ain? "

" You seem mighty cocksure of yourself behind that scalper," Soapy remarked coolly, but without moving. " Now, I'm a purty bad man, I guess most people can tell you that, but just now I ain't goin' to fight with any one. Of course I always kill my man. I guess no fellow can go round these parts saying Soapy Sam didn't make a lasting job of his carcass."

" I guess you're like that white-livered Sheriff that the tenderfeet put up to boss things," Bill broke in. " I wouldn't mind going nap that if you and me met where there war' no greasy Mongolians to help you, it wouldn't be my ghost that would hang round the place after."

Soapy's eyes glittered. Well he knew an attempt was being made to force a quarrel upon him, which, by the unwritten law of the wild, he would have to fight alone. " As I re-marked afore, I ain't crawlin' round looking for trouble," he said slowly, and evidently restraining his temper, " and I don't want to fight no man unless he gives too much cheek."

" Will cheek mak' ye fight, Soapy? " asked Stewart. " Because, if it will, just tak' it for granted that I've called ye everything frae a piebald nigger to a half-caste gorilla, and that I've given it as my maist solemn opinion that the only claim you have to being an American is based on the fact that you were born in ane o' her State prisons. Mac thought ye micht possibly be a cross between a Polish Jew and a Hottentot, but I'm thinkin' that to believe ye

that wad be an awfu' insult to these vera respectable folk."

"The man will not fight, Stewart, and you needn't waste wind on him when you'll need it all pulling the sleigh," interrupted Mac. "Come on, lads, let's get started."

"Goodbye for the present, Soapy," the Captain sang out; "we'll be back soon."

"And I'll fecht ye wi' one hand, ye slithery, sloppy, soapy skunk!" bellowed Stewart in a last attempt to draw the man.

For a moment it looked as if he had succeeded. Soapy's hand moved quickly to his belt, but Bill saw his game and forestalled him.

"A fair fight, Soapy," he said, "or say you have no appetite for it. Any of us will take ye on any time, and under any circus rules."

"I've first claim, Bill," reminded Stewart.

"Then by the howling terrors I'll claw ye into sawdust the next time we meet!" roared Soapy.

"Say goodbye, lads," grunted Stewart. "We'll never see Soapy again."

"You needn't burn our hut, Soapy, although we're not the best of neighbors," said the Captain as the quartette and the dog harnessed themselves. "If you do you will only be marking up trouble for yourself, for you may take it from me, as a man who doesn't talk for talking's sake, that I will call you to account for it when next we meet. I may mention the fact, too, that the North-West Police are on the trail to Dawson now, and I expect they'll make things a bit hot for you."

"I won't burn the hut, Captain," rejoined Soapy

cheerfully, "but I can't answer for my boys, and anyway I don't care a cent for all the North-West Police that will ever get up here. I guess my fellows will eat them if they don't get rations pretty quick."

"Go back to your yellowskins and get some breakfast then, my man," advised Mac, as they moved off. "And I hope you'll get rewarded for your labors in our shaft in fair proportion to the energy you expend. All the same, I should advise you to take out an insurance policy if there's any company will accept the risk between here and the South Pole."

Soapy did not answer. He was experiencing a new sensation, and it was not altogether pleasant. Never before had men dared to talk to him in such a slighting strain. When his taunters swung round into the Klondike's broad iceway, however, he felt safer, and then the air became filled with the choicest curses in vogue on the Pacific slope.

But no one minded. As a matter of fact they were only heard by his own people, and caused Chilcoot Charlie, as he uncoiled himself from his blanket, to wonder if Soapy had been frostbitten.

The sleigh travelled smoothly, and, led by Archie, who once more marked out the trail, the party made good headway towards the glacier-crested range in which the Klondike River was supposed to have its source. The country was much the same as that with which they had become so familiar during the long journey down the Yukon, and their course was only interrupted by the ice-jam which marked the confluences of the smaller gullies, chiefly on the south side, with the main river.

When the sun neared the end of its short journey they had reached the base of the closing-in spurs, and drawing off into the sombre pine forest they hurriedly prepared a camp, and Stewart set about the special work for which he was, more or less, justly famous.

" I'll bet a dinner, when we git back to any place where we can git one, that all the gold in this warm country comes from that hill in front of us," Kentucky Bill remarked as they clustered round the blazing fire that night. " I've seen most goldfields in this here continent and the gold has always been shed from a peak just like that."

" How dae ye ken what that peak is like? " Stewart asked. " It's maybe nothing but a solid chunk o' ice."

" You lift that glacier off the top and you'll see," Bill rejoined enigmatically. " It is my belief that those monkey men from the other side of this poor ole world hiv' discovered that fact an' are makin' dollars now by the sackful."

" There might be something in what you say, Bill," the Captain admitted, " especially as Soapy's headquarters are up there somewhere."

" But why should he come down and waste time working the alluvial deposits near our camp if he knew of the source of the gold? " asked Archie.

" That's just what I've been revolving in my mind all day, Archie," answered the Captain, " and the idea has grown upon me that he didn't steal that contrivance of yours without having some idea of using it. Making a guess, I should say he knew of some big formation up here, and thought that

your system was all he wanted to turn the more or less refractory ores into solid gold. Of course the Mongolians knew of it too, and hence Soapy's connection with them."

"But that doesn't explain how he left such a bonanza and jumped our claim," put in Mac.

"An' what for should he no'?" asked Stewart, who had been lost in the profundity of his thoughts for some time. "Hasna Archie telt us that nae man who hadna a vera advanced scientific knowledge could work the patent? I'm thinkin' freend Soapy kens mair aboot things honest men are ignorant of than chemistry and electricity. He's found the thing is nae use to him, an' he rushed us wi' the intention o' next stealing the inventor."

"I hardly think he jumped our shaft for any other reason than to obtain a piece of valuable ground," laughed Archie. "From what we know of the methods which obtain among a certain section of claim holders, mining is not their forte. Doubtless he and his gang will just sit tight until the place booms in spring, when they will sell out to the highest bidders. What he stole Ralstons' model for I don't know, unless that, being an ignorant man, and knowing of the rich gold deposits up here, he thought, from the garbled accounts of the invention given in the American Press, that it would do the work of extracting the gold itself, and need neither labor to work it nor attention."

"Well, laddie, he'll not sit vera long on our ground," Mac observed quietly. "I'm thinkin' I know how to shift him when we reckon the time has come for his ejection. But it is that wonderful box

of wires an' mysteries we want in the meantime, an' so long as Soapy camps over that shaft of ours, and keeps his unwashed half-castes around him, we'll be the better able to explore this city of glaciers, gold, and ungodliness, an' if the white man's joss is there we'll find it."

"If the worst comes to the worst we may be able to get some help from King James," the Captain said. "And I suppose we might even enlist Broncho Jim and some of the Dawson men. They would all roll up for a fight against Soapy and his Asiatic crew."

"Man, I like to hear your voice, Captain," Stewart said insinuatingly. "If ye would just keep on tintinabulatin' that tongue o' yours for a wee I would be sleepin', an', wha kens, maybe dreamin' I was sittin' doon to a richt gorgeous banquet, wi' Soapy Sam attendin' as a waiter —— "

"What was wrong with the supper you h
night already, ye gormandizing sinner?" a
with a show of indignation. "Can you n
example from the dog there an' live on t
air you're gettin' for nothing?"

"Mac, I am vera much grieved to h
on the natural cravin's o' my hea
Many a puir millionaire throughout t
would be glad to hae my hunger, f
been in to its last hole this many
sleep is guid for a man wi' a vacu
It's a fine thing sleep, and it's
naebody's patent. Guid nicht."

Stewart rolled himself in his bl
seconds was doubtless enjoying

in which the beans were not counted, nor the bacon issued sparingly.

And soon the whole camp followed his example. and the howling of the coyotes and other starving creatures sounded in their ears as sweet music. The stars of the north climbed through the great dome, and the northern streamers shed a weird light over the white-spangled pines. In time an intense darkness succeeded, then faint streaks of light appeared to shoot athwart the glacier crests in th uth. Dave rose, shook himself, and barked out l morning and as one man the entire occu- up. Another day had begun. before the sun had made its after the sleigh was on the e heading laboriously up the ly in the afternoon a gorge of the mountains was reached, at timber had been chopped ly, the party concluded that d into the city of the Mon- wung into the dark icicle-

cried, as they passed be- and felt the intense cold chill them to the heart. this cañon; it hasn't a

ow which has drifted in aptain answered.

ersisted Mac; "but d — Hullo!"

Mac's words to be

not without reason. He had disappeared in the frosted yet soft snow, and only a sudden halt prevented all from being likewise precipitated into the depths. With blanched faces they lay flat and crawled forward to their comrade's assistance. He had broken through the frozen casing, and only his grip of the sleigh ropes had saved him from sinking farther than could be determined, for not even in the short summer could that cañon lose its deposit of snow accumulated through years of piled-up driftings.

"Don't struggle so much," Mac roared. "And hold on to the rope."

Whether his words were heard or not, no suitable reply was given, and Stewart was greatly grieved to find that even the usually quiet and smooth-tempered Captain had a method of expressing his feelings more terse than sensible. He was eventually hauled out, however, and after some investigations, in which Mac discovered that the snow was hard on the left side of the gorge, the journey was resumed.

A few miles were passed rapidly and then suddenly the walls of the gully widened out and the party found themselves in a cup-shaped depression, evidently the crater of an extinct volcano. Above them and before them, except for a break on the opposite side similar in appearance to the gorge they had just traversed, the great white slopes swept upwards. They stood for a moment, fearing to venture out upon the lake of snow which formed the false floor of the hollow, then Archie gave a cry of surprise. "Look!" he exclaimed; "I see

houses over on the far side. Surely this cannot be where the Mongolians live? "

" By Jupiter, you're right! " the Captain said. " They are built upon the slope too. Let us work our way round to them."

" I smell something for eating," chortled Stewart; " I dreamt last night we were to get a repast fit for kings in a place just like this."

" Dream again then, Stewart, and tell us how to get across," said Mac. " I have little doubt we'll find some dried caribou or salmon inside the houses; and seeing their owners — if they are Mongolians — jumped our claim we need have little compunction about taking a temporary loan o' their place."

" If we tied our blankets over our moccasins we might be able to cross that snow safely," Archie suggested. " They should act as well as snow-shoes."

" Man, you are a born inventor, Archie," said Mac admiringly; " you've struck the vera idea."

And so it proved, for with the greater surface to bear their weight the snow seemed easily able to carry them, and very soon they had launched out on the white expanse.

" There is something about this place I don't like," muttered Kentucky Bill, as they neared the quaint wooden buildings on the far side. " It seems to me like a playground for spooks."

" Man, dinna mak' me lose ma appetite," Stewart implored; " a feed o' caribou is a thing I wadna miss though a' the ghosts that ever lived were dancin' roond me. Come on, Macduff — I mean Bill,— and starved be he who first cries ' Caribou enough.' "

The speaker broke into a run, and at once tripped over the towing ropes.

"Get up, you lazy orang-outang," growled Mac, as he stumbled over him; "you can't lie here; you're blockin' the traffic."

"Are you hurt, Stewart?" Archie enquired sympathetically, assisting the hungry one to struggle to a perpendicular position.

"Ay, I'm hurt, laddie," came the answer, in dolorous tones, which caused the rest of the party to laugh unfeelingly. "I'm hurt, but no bodily. It's waur than that; I'm hurt in my heart to think that that cold-hearted Pharisee, whom I hae nurtured wi' so much care for so lang — I refer to the misguided backslider ca'ed Mac, whom I forgive — should mak' a fool o' himself by spiling ma beautiful quotation frae Shakespeare. Of course he never heard o' him an' ——"

"Get a move on, Stewart," cried Bill. "It will be as dark as a Scotch joke in five minutes."

"An' there's caribou hanging up waitin' for us in these funny houses," added Mac artfully. "And we all know that there's not a man between here an' Magellan Strait who can cook dried caribou like Stewart."

With a bound the sleigh moves forward. All were already in fancy sitting down to a feast the like of which had not come their way for many days. Just as darkness enveloped the snow-covered land in impenetrable folds, the opposite side was reached, and the sleigh pulled up towards the houses, which seemed to be built upon a ledge, some distance up the slope. There was no sign

of life anywhere; all was silent and still, and not even the barking of a dog greeted their advance.

"How about timber for a fire?" asked Archie. "I don't see any about here."

"There seems to be plenty down that gully leading away from this place," the Captain said. "But I can't make out what we've struck at all. This place looks like a city of the dead."

"I have an unfailing instinct that tells me there's something guid for eatin' in that hoose there," chimed in Stewart, "and whether oor freends the Mongolians are ásleep, or deid, or down wi' Soapy Sam on Too-much-gold Creek, we're goin' to sample it. I think caribou, especially dried, is the one thing I would like to be a glutton on."

The party stopped in front of the house Stewart's instinct had led them to, and by the aid of a few matches they surveyed it. It was a large log hut, much superior in build to any they had yet seen in the country, and even in the flickering matchlight, they could see there were some crude ornamentations surmounting the roof.

"Be careful, boys," whispered the Captain. "This must be the chief's house. The people of these parts go to sleep early during the winter, and, if we make a noise, we may have a mob of indignant natives around us before we know where we are."

"I think I can make out a lot of poles behind this house," Archie said. "They seem to be ornamented too."

"A hungry man kens nae law," grunted Stewart. "Where's the door?"

"Here," answered the Captain; "but it is built

of timber we can't burst through, and is barred correspondingly."

"Then where's the window?" continued Stewart. "Caribou calls, and I must go."

But Mac had already examined the barred spaces which served as windows. "Here is one of them, Stewart," he said; "but it looks as if it had been built to keep out a Glasgow thief, so I'm thinking our feast will have to be postponed. We'll maybe be able to barter wi' the natives for something to eat in the morning."

"We'll tak' it now," growled Stewart. "Come, Bill, lend a hand. I'll eat all the ghosts we see."

"But this is housebreaking," said Archie. "Shouldn't we first try to rouse the inhabitants?"

"We'll go round and see if that is possible, Archie," the Captain proposed. "These three burglars have got as much work in hand as will keep them engaged until we return."

And the Captain was right. In half an hour Archie and he returned and found Mac, Bill, and Stewart still engaged in their nefarious work.

"We've struck a deserted village," the Captain announced, "so you may take things easier. We can leave flour in exchange for anything we take."

"After I'm done eatin' there'll no be much left here I'm thinkin'," Stewart muttered. "Come on, lads, all together!"

Every man in the party was now intent on gaining an entrance to the well-barricaded house, but Dave did not display the enthusiasm which the prospect of a good meal might have justified.

Finally Mac levered off the window bars with a steel rod they carried for mining purposes, and with a chuckle of delight Stewart climbed through the aperture made and dropped inside.

CHAPTER XIII

PRISONERS

FOR a minute Stewart was silent. He had lit a match and was looking round the apartment into which he had broken. But it was very cold outside, and the men were hungry.

"Hurry up, Stewart!" admonished Bill. "Don't waste the night huntin' for a lookin'-glass; ye'll only crack it. Pass out the caribou."

Still the burglar was silent, and, knowing his nature well, Mac became suspicious. "Stewart!" he cried, pushing himself through the window space; "you're surely not feeding yourself before attending to the crying necessities o' your comrades?"

Stewart held up his match and looked at Mac strangely. "Oh, is it you, Mac?" he said with childlike innocence. "Man, I was just thinkin' what a fine place this wad be for an hotel. Living wadna cost much, an' look at the quiet an' peacefu' ——"

"You red-headed missin' link. What game are you trying to play? If I come in I'll give you all you want o' a quiet life; and your comrades out here in the cold waitin' for some caribou ——"

"Just come right in, Mac; come right in. But watch ye don't stick in the hole, an' mind the step that isna here. Wait an' I'll help ye; ye're no' so young as ye once were, ye ken, Mac."

Mac was already halfway through the entrance; but when he heard how anxious Stewart was for his company, and how tenderly solicitous he was for his welfare, he paused suspiciously.

"You concentrated essence of superfluity," he bellowed, "I'm asking you what idiotic caper your intellect is struggling with now. Tell me and I'll let in some luminosity ——"

"I was thinkin' what a fine fellow ye are, Mac, an' I'm overflowin' wi' geniune admiration at the magneeficent spectacle ye mak' stuck in a hole in a wooden window, an' filled wi' gratitude that Providence hasna made my dimension round the equator as extraordinary as yours. But come in, ye'll catch cold; an' this is the vera place for an esoteric eschatologist like you."

Mac began to wriggle back to the outer world, but, seeing this, Stewart dropped his match, and, seizing his comrade by the shoulders, pulled him, despite his struggles, into the room.

"Now, Mac," he said, "ye've got matches o' your ain, an' may your ruminations be philosophical if they canna be logical."

"Stewart, my man," cried Mac, "come back! I don't like the smell in this place. Come back an' help me out!"

"There's an auld proverb, Mac, that comes very forcibly to my mind just now," replied Stewart from the outside of the aperture, which was much higher to reach from the inside than from where he now stood. "It's about a fox that got his tail cut off. Now, he was a fox that thought a lot o' himself, an' what worried him mair than the loss o' his tail,

which was in the road anyway, was the thought that a' his freends would laugh at him. But ye ken yoursel' what he did. What! Ye'll no answer? That shows ye're ignorant o' the classics; so I'll tell ye. He went round a' the other foxes and told them he had got it cut off on purpose, because a tail wasna necessary, and, in fact, was only a survival from the time when foxes werena ceevilized. He then went on to expound on the advantages o' being withoot a tail an' did it so weel that all the foxes that had any self respect or desire to be up-to-date went straight awa' an' contracted wi' the firm o' — I'll no' mention names, for that wad be givin' them a free advertisement — to cut off a' their tails. Of course they couldna laugh at the pioneer o' tail reform then an' —— "

Stewart was hauled from his position suddenly, and Kentucky Bill pushed his head through the hole left vacant. " What in thunder is the matter Mac? " he asked. " Why has that lanky hunger-bag come out? And why in creation don't you pass out some caribou? "

" I can't, man, I can't," Mac said lugubriously; " I'm not able —— "

He had taken in the nature of the place or at least had arrived at certain conclusions regarding it, while Stewart had been delivering himself of his story of the fox and was now most anxious that Bill and the Captain should not have a laugh at him. He had fully understood Stewart's hint and knew that that gentleman would not interfere to save the tails of the other foxes.

" Howlin' terrors! " exclaimed Bill, leaping

through; " I guess we've struck a patch as good as Too-much-gold Creek, if there's more grub here than you can handle."

" Say no more, Bill," groaned Mac. " What is here has been here a long time, I'm thinking. But fetch the Captain in. We'll need his good judgment."

" I'm coming, Mac," cried that individual; " and you needn't think that age will affect dried caribou in this temperature; this cellar place is a natural refrigerating chamber." He followed Bill into the apartment, and, lighting matches, all looked round.

Just then Stewart's voice was heard outside, and this is what it said: " No, no, Archie; you an' me an' the dog are far ower young and innocent to go down there among these greedy men. Come awa' doon the High Street a bit so that we'll no' hear their wicked talk, an' I'll gie ye a lecture I've been working up in my mind for some conseederable time on the evils o' intemperance."

" But we must stay to help them to pass out whatever they find," Archie remonstrated. " Besides, I think your lecture is a bit inappropriate just now. I confess that I would eat more than might be good for me if I got an opportunity."

" Would you eat a mummy, laddie? For if no', come awa' an' I'll tell ye aboot a gorgeous banquet I once made oot o' a pair o' old boots when wrecked on an iceberg on the other side o' the North Pole."

The voices became indistinct, and the men in the house wondered why Stewart had apparently lost all interest in the plunder they were about to obtain. All but Mac. A horrible suspicion was growing upon him.

"There's a mighty peculiar smell about this shebang," Kentucky Bill remarked. "Caribou has no call to smell like this." He struck another light and looked around. "I don't see any caribou," he continued.

"Nor I," said Mac. "I think we'd better get out o' here ——"

"But what's that on these shelves?" asked the Captain. "It is something we might ——"

"Hold your tongue, man, hold your tongue," implored Mac. "Look closer."

"Why, Mac, what is the matter with you?" asked the Captain. "You look as if you had lost all hope of ever getting a meal. Hullo! There's Bill's match out. Strike another, Bill; I haven't got any."

"Somehow I feel mighty creepy in this here saloon," Bill muttered, lighting another match, and moving towards the tier of shelves which the Captain had indicated. "I guess I'll carry my shooter in my fist. Howling blizzards! What's that?"

Bill's match had suddenly gone out, and he was staring at a something on one of the shelves which glittered phosphorescently. He took a step closer. "It's a man's skeleton, and it's livin'," he yelled. "Come on, boys, we've got our call." He leaped at the aperture leading to the outer world as he spoke, and, feeling powerless to move, the Captain and Mac looked at each other.

At length the Captain laughed strangely. "It's no use, Mac," he said. "I don't mind taking even chances with the living, but when it comes to standing up against that — that sort of animated thing over there, I'm off."

"Nonsense, man!" Mac replied with an effort. "I've been thinking a bit, and I have come to the conclusion that Bill was too hasty in his behavior. I don't fear anything living myself, and I'm not going to begin at this time o' day to fear the dead."

"But it moved, Mac! I saw it move! I know we are in a totem house, and that those shelves bear the mortal remains of many generations, but I have heard strange tales of how some tribes place their old people upon these shelves before they are dead an' ——"

"Dinna be frightened, Mac, I'm comin'," shouted Stewart's stentorian voice from above, and at that moment he came bounding through the window. "I've just heard Kentucky's story, and left him wi' Archie an' the dog to calm down. He says he saw ghosts."

"Look over there," the Captain muttered. "You have heard the story of the Indian chief who was roused from his totem shelf to settle a boundary dispute, after having lain there for a hundred years?"

"Ay, an' didna believe it," returned Stewart. "I kent this was a totem hoose whenever I got inside, for I've seen lots o' them afore, though never ane like this." He lit a match and walked boldly over to the shelf, and, while he was there, Bill and Archie came through the hole in the window and joined the others. Archie had with great foresight taken a candle from the sleigh, and with its aid the party surveyed the weird shelves and their occupants. It was a monument to one family; nor was the sight gruesome, for the intense cold had preserved the features wonderfully. Of course Bill's imagination

had played him a trick, and little wonder. He had never heard of totem houses before, although the totem poles of the Indian coastal tribes were common enough, and well known to him.

"We'll hae nae caribou the nicht, lads," said Stewart woefully. "I'm thinkin' that beans will satisfy a' oor appetites after all."

"What a howlin' surprise," muttered Bill. "Here were we lookin' for caribou and dried salmon in——"

"Change the subject, Bill, it's not pleasant," advised Mac, "and let us get out to the fresh air at once. One thing I have noticed, which may yet be of a scientific interest to the world, is that these people are not Indians. They are Asiatics of the Tungusian branch of Mongolians, and the fact that they have totem houses shows that they must have been highly civilized at one time, for ancestral worship is a very high form of religion."

"What seems to concern us more, Mac," said Archie, as they regained the open air, "is that we must be within reasonable distance of the village where the living Mongolians stay. Shall we attempt to reach it?"

"No, we've had enough excitement for one night. Pick a trail down into that gully. I saw trees there before the sun went down, and we'll have some hot coffee and beans, and maybe something else if Stewart is not too tired. To-morrow we'll likely find that living Mongolians are a wee bit more dangerous than dead ones."

"An' I guess I'll show you boys that I am not skeered o' anything livin', although I was skeered to-night," spoke Kentucky Bill.

" Bill, my man," said Mac, " you've shown us your calibre before now, and you don't need to excuse yourself. To tell you the honest truth, I would have cleared out too, only I knew I couldn't get through the hole without help."

" And as for me," the Captain added, " besides losing my nerves, I lost the power of locomotion, or I would have been through the window before you, Bill."

" All's weel that ends weel," murmured Stewart. " Archie has got the trail, so start the engines."

The men strained at the sleigh ropes and moved along after their youthful leader, whose lighted candle shone out weirdly in that dismal valley. A suitable camping ground was soon found among some gaunt pine trees which grew haphazardly along the slopes of the gully, and very soon Stewart had boiling coffee ready, which, with some floury concoction fried in fat, and known to wanderers in solitudes as " flap jacks," formed the supper. Little time was wasted that night in conversation, and, trusting the protection of the camp to Dave, all were soon coiled in their blankets fast asleep.

After breakfast, partaken of next morning before the belated sun rose, the march was resumed, and, to every one's surprise, an hour's steady pulling brought them to the end of the gorge, and a great white timber-clad plain stretched beneath them, extending as far as they could see. A long sinuous streak of silver-white, discernible only because of the gap it formed between the pines, seemed to cut the great plain in two, and between that line and

the base of the slope on which they stood, a cluster of huts could be distinguished.

"Well, boys," the Captain remarked after some time had been spent taking in the scene, "I fancy we have made a discovery. We have come right through the ranges, hitherto supposed impassable by the miners in Dawson, and that must be the Stewart River down there. It strikes me we have found a short cut into Klondike, for the Yukon twists considerably, if I remember rightly, after its confluence with the Stewart, before reaching Dawson."

"But would not the task of pulling sleighs over the route we have come counterbalance any difference in actual travelling distance?" asked Archie, making a sketch of the configuration of the country. "I am sure we could come up the Yukon to the nearest point on that ice river down there as soon as we could cross through the two gullies and the crater in which we found the totem houses."

"What you say is right, Archie," said Mac thoughtfully; "but I am vera glad to see you drawing maps, for I've got the impression we're making history just now. You see, if a rush sets in to this place in the spring, which is most likely, it may be that the Klondike River, with its Bonanza an' Eldorado Creeks, not to speak of Too-much-gold Creek, will be the scene o' the greatest activity, an' then the value o' this track may be realized for by means of it the Klondike River could be reached without going near Dawson, and by a much shorter journey."

"Slow up, Mac," interjected Bill. "If you start

lookin' after the interests o' the blamed tenderfeet who will come in here in spring like a plague o' mosquitoes, I guess we'll be hungry again before we see the color of the people who live down in those shebangs."

"Dinna disturb him, lads," cried Stewart. "I ken Mac weel, an' he doesna care although he dees o' starvation so lang as the crows or coyottes could get a good feed on his bones, an' his fame wad gang doon to posterity like my freend Willie Shakespeare's. Staund by the engines again; I want to have a look at the river which somebody, kennin' my great merits, has been guid enough to name after me."

"Stewart, you incorrigible, unredemptionable compound o' protoplasm," said Mac sadly, "humanity and fame are evanescent, and on the shoreless sea of eternity man and his desires and his gold are just dreams. A thousand years after this, where shall we be?"

"I shudder to think, Mac," put in the Captain, "but in half an hour I hope we'll be within a short distance of that village. It is not a bone museum, for I see smoke rising from some of the huts now."

"Ah, well," sighed Mac, taking up his end of the towing rope, "only the dog, and maybe Archie, seem to have any thought o' the morrow. Full speed ahead!"

And full speed down the slope they made, and before the feeble sun had reached the meridian they had entered the village.

"Go slow now, boys," cautioned the Captain. "Indians are not treacherous, but it is our Asiatic

friends who hang out here, and I don't know that hospitality is one of their virtues."

"We're as peaceably inclined as Soapy Sam was when he squatted doon on oor shaft," answered Stewart, "and we can pay for what we get. This is a gey funny city a' the same, and the hooses are no' just in accordance wi' the latest styles o' architectural beauty."

"Here comes the population," cried Archie. "They are the same people as those with Soapy Sam, and certainly look as if they couldn't harm anything."

"Appearances are often deceptive, Archie," said Mac, as the party came to a halt in the middle of the village. "You just remember that these same people's ancestors conquered every other race they encountered on their great raid — probably the greatest in the world's history — north from China. They were highly civilized then, and might have peopled the entire earth had Providence not made them direct their energies into the waste places o' northern Siberia, where their great horde split up into sections, one of which evidently crossed Behring Strait from Kamchatka and settled here."

"Education is a mighty fine thing, Mac," Bill interrupted. "Try that yarn on these ancient and brave people and see how they take it themselves. I'll bet all they know about their blamed ancestors is what they have guessed from the size of their bones in the totem house."

"Ye havering gomerils," burst out Stewart, "ye'll be totems yoursel's in a meenit. That effigy o' Father Christmas is speakin' to us, an' I expect he

is asking whether we'd like to be roasted or fried."

A crowd of the strange-looking people had now gathered round the explorers, and were eyeing them curiously but not aggressively, discussing them at the same time in a language which had some resemblance to Chinese, yet included the guttural peculiar to the Indian dialects of the far north. The men kept a respectful distance off, but the women and children were more inquisitive, and came close up to the white men, inspecting them critically, and eyeing the laden sleigh with even greater interest.

"How?" said one of the ladies to Archie with what he supposed was intended for an encouraging smile. She was dressed in furs, and only the upper part of her face was visible. Silver bangles, and other articles of jewelry fashioned out of the same metal, crudely yet with a certain elementary art, were lavished upon her person. Evidently she was someone of importance in the tribe, for those around her were by no means so elaborately adorned. Archie supposed she was young, but despite all his efforts to imagine her the princess of romance, as met with in story books, he could not but admit that she was about the ugliest creature he had ever seen. He had not seen many types of beauty, of course, and that of the proud transplanted Tungusian was a kind which, to appreciate, would require a taste cultivated for as many centuries, perhaps, as there were years in his life. He smiled, however, and returned the salutation: "How?" most politely; whereupon the lady laid her fur-covered hand on his arm, and spoke volubly and unintelligibly

for a minute, and then endeavored to lead him away. But Archie did not feel inclined to leave his companions, even although it was a princess who requested him to do so. He informed the lady that he had a pressing business engagement requiring his immediate attention; but she did not seem to think that that fact mattered, at least she ignored his words, and continued to smile.

Archie resisted even the smile, and, finally, with a snort of displeasure, the lady turned to Stewart and threw one of her fur coverings over his shoulder.

Stewart threw the mantle from him with unnecessary violence. "Keep awa' frae me, woman!" he roared. "Keep awa' frae me or I'll — I'll ——"

"Stewart," expostulated the Captain, who well knew the meaning of the fair maid's act, "where is your gallantry? The lady has just asked you to marry her. Surely you can't ——"

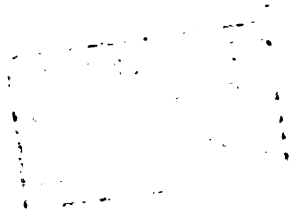
"Can I no'? Marry her yersel' if ye like her sae weel. I'm a bit fastidious — Gang awa', ye prismatic-faced tempter o' man! Gang awa' an' think shame o' yersel, or try Mac here!"

The lady did not understand what Stewart said, but, guessing that he was not any more favorably disposed than was Archie, she looked at Mac critically, much to that individual's consternation.

"See what it is to be handsome," laughed Kentucky Bill. "Marry her, Mac, and become King of the Mongolians, an' we'll be your Parliament. We'll get the Stars and Stripes or the Union Jack to take us in out of the cold, an' I guess ——"

"We don't want to know what you guess," Mac interrupted. "Have Stewart an' me come through

"THE LADY TURNED TO STEWART AND THREW ONE OF HER FUR COVERINGS OVER HIS SHOULDER"



this weary world safe so far to be caught by a — by a — " Here Mac's inherent gallantry came out, and instead of the hard words he meant to utter about the princess he substituted: " by a poor misguided, half-frozen, Alaskan-China woman. No, no, my lassie! leave Stewart alone. I've no doubt his great personal beauty appeals to you, but you don't know him as well as I do, and I would advise you to try the Captain. You could go down to New York or some warmer climate with him, and sell these skins you are wearing, and with the money you got start housekeeping on a big scale, an' maybe have enough money left to buy yourself a piece o' soap, which, to speak candidly, you are much in need of. Speak to the Captain now, that's a good lassie."

The girl looked from Stewart to Mac, and from Mac to the Captain, but even the last-named was indisposed to make advances. " I'm not a marrying man," he said. " Try Kentucky Bill; I know he's tired of a wandering life and wants to settle down."

" If the blamed mummy-faced squaw comes any nearer me before she washes that smell o' fish oil from her carcass, I'll — I'll —— "

" Canny Bill," implored Stewart; " dinna use language before ladies that is no' in the dictionary. Just you speak kindly to the lady, and tell her —— "

" Tell her yourself, ye blamed galoot," shouted Bill. " Ye are as ugly as her anyway, an' I guess would just about be a match —— "

But the lady herself now had something to say; evidently she had guessed that the white men had not appreciated the honor done them. She spoke,

tersely and emphatically, no doubt, for five minutes, and then stalked majestically away. Her departure was the signal for the rest of the people to close round, and with much talking, that to Archie sounded like the barking of a number of dogs, they made it clear that they desired to know the business of the white men, and why the white men had each in turn refused the hand of their illustrious princess.

"If you would talk English, Scotch, Irish, or American I believe we might understand you folks better," Mac said when he got a chance. "If you are asking us to dinner, though, you needn't start to repeat the invitation; we'll come with much pleasure."

"Ugh!" grunted one of the men; "what white men want here?"

"Now, I call that a reasonable question," Stewart replied, beaming on the interrogator; "an' to answer it as straightforward as my natural inclination for grandiloquent phraseology will allow, I may whisper the fact in your ear — if ye let me ken whauraboots among your furs ye keep yer hearing apparatus — that we're hungry an' we came here hoping ye would ask us to stay to dinner ——"

"Ugh! You too muchy talky talky," the spokesman of the Indian-Chinese interrupted; "this our hunting grounds. We here first. No want nothing to do with you white men. You all heap big stealers. No gold here. Go away. Ugh!"

"Ugh yourself," cried Mac; "we're not stealers. Nor do we want gold as badly as you seem to think."

"We will pay for anything in the way of food you

give us," put in Archie, fearing that his fiery comrades would soon ruin all their hopes of effecting their business with the tribesmen. "If you are well stocked with dried salmon or caribou, or any other foodstuff, we'll deal with you fairly for as much as you can spare."

"Why you no' King James's people? They friends of white men. We give nothing to you. No 'nough for own people see winter through. You white men better dead anyhow. No good anyone."

"Thanks," said Kentucky Bill; "I guess you have struck pretty near the bull's-eye that time, old mahogany face. It is a fact that white men are not much good on this here little planet of ours, but blow me if the black, yellow, red, or piebald cusses are any better. If you've got any spare grub, I guess you'd better trot it out or we'll have to make a meal of you."

The man was not listening to Bill. He was holding a hurried consultation with some of the more important tribesmen, who evidently had suddenly discovered that the presence of the white men was not necessarily a circumstance to be dreaded. Finally the spokesman turned to the explorers again.

"Come," he grunted; "heap lot grub in big house over here. Come; heap plenty grub, salmon, caribou, bear, an' heap more."

"A man's a man for a' that!" Stewart cried, as they followed the Mongolians to a large house; "even though he's half Chinese an' half frozen Indian. The seeds o' hospitality were planted in man at his beginning, and the plant's as strong now in the heart o' a red nigger as in that o' a

Glesga bailie. My conscience! I'll eat enough at this feast to last me a month."

"Better wait until we get the feast, Stewart, before you shout so much about the seeds of hospitality," broke in the Captain; "if I remember aright the same poet that you have just quoted also said something about man's inhumanity to man which does not agree with your theory of his kind-heartedness."

"Make less noise, lads," remonstrated Mac; "you're frightening the natives. See how agitated they are."

"Inside heap plenty eat," spoke the guide at Mac's elbow. "You eat heap lot an' Auld Lang Syne."

"Noo, isn't that wonderfu'?" commented Stewart, as they drew their sleigh inside. "These niggers ken a lot mair than they get credit for. Just see hoo they a' stood back to let us enter first. I ca' that real politeness ——"

"But it isn't," shouted Archie, springing towards the door. "It's a trick."

The door closed as he reached it, and the heavy bars rattled into their sockets outside. "We are trapped!" Archie cried; and he spoke truly.

The men looked at each other in mute wonderment. They were shut inside a log-built erection out of which it would be next to impossible to force a way. It had become pitch dark when the door had been closed, and they could not see the nature of their immediate surroundings.

"I guess, Stewart," laughed Bill, these blamed Chinamen have made an extra special study of horticulture. Anyhow they've developed these seeds of hospitality ye were singin' about a minute ago, into

a regular garden of plants. I only hope their extraordinary kindness won't be too much for us."

"Man, ye should hold your tongue when ye speak," retorted Stewart. "I dinna see what ye've got to mak' a noise aboot. I ken nothin' could please me better than to be shut up in a place where there was plenty to eat, an' nae need to spoil my digestion by boltin' it in a hurry —— "

"But how do you know there is anything to eat in this place?" asked Archie. "We may be inside another totem house."

"I hae an instinct that is maist remarkable when my stomach is empty," answered Stewart. "I've felt a' day that a guid feed would come oor way afore nicht, an' — Didna I tell ye? I kent my instinct wasna cheatin' me."

Mac had struck a light, and, sure enough, the carcasses of many caribou could be seen hanging from rafters at one end of the house.

With a cry of delight the men rushed towards them, but Archie stayed to grope for a candle among the bundles on the sleigh, and with the aid of its light it soon became apparent that the party were prisoners in what must have been a storeroom or general tribal larder.

"Were ever hungry men so lucky?" murmured Mac, eyeing the venison with a grunt of satisfaction.

"Lock the doors on the inside, ye beggars," Stewart chuckled. "The Chinamen will be tryin' to chase us oot o' oor rightfu' prison afore lang, an' we're just no' goin' to go."

"At least not until we have dined," the Captain

laughed. " By Jove, but we're willing prisoners this time! "

Bill did not speak, nor did Archie make any comment. They were busily engaged in making a fire with some timber they found stacked in a corner of their prison. They at length succeeded in their attempts, but the pungent smoke almost suffocated everyone before Mac found that a log high in the walls was slack, and swung on a central pivot, evidently for ventilating purposes.

" I don't think the folk who built this place were ever troubled with sensitive olfactory organs," he said, as he swung it open with his rifle barrel; " but anyway, if that hole could let out the smell o' themselves, it can let out pitch-pine smoke."

" You're a man o' pairts, Mac," spluttered Stewart, who had now assumed charge of cooking operations. " Cut off some mair slices, Archie, an' we'll hae a supper that a' the gold in the Klondike couldna buy. Dae ye like your steaks weel or underdone, boys —— ? "

" Where's Dave? " interrupted Archie. " I forgot all about him, and don't remember where I saw him last."

" Well, that's hard luck," cried Bill. " We'll have to go out into the cold world after all, to look for our dog. I call it blamed awkward, seein' we're so comfortable in here."

" And here we'll remain, Bill," the Captain said, after looking round the apartment again in hopes of seeing Dave. " We can't break through these walls, and you may be sure that when our captors built so strong a place to hold their dead, they've taken

extra special care that this, the place which holds their means of life, is able to withstand all the damage we can do to it."

"But I am going to look for Dave," said Archie, "even if I have to wriggle through the smoke hole up there. Help me to reach it, Mac."

"It strikes me Dave will get us more easily than we can find him," Mac answered. "I saw a big disturbance among the native dogs as we came in here. I expect it was caused by Dave teaching them Stewart's laws o' hospitality."

"Why can't ye shout on the dog?" put in Bill. "I guess if he knew where we were he would find a way in mighty slick, if there was a hole a streak o' daylight could get through."

"I never thought of that," Archie said, putting his fingers into his mouth and causing a shrill whistle to ring out. Before the echoes had died away, Dave's bark answered outside, and be began to scrape at the door.

"Good dog!" cried Archie; "find a way inside."

"And hurry up and get a fine slice o' roast caribou," added Stewart.

"And don't wait to fight any other dogs," cautioned Mac. "They're not o' your station in life, and you shouldn't be seen in their company."

But Dave had departed. Evidently the natives had also gone to their several huts, for no sounds that might indicate their presence outside could now be heard.

Cooking preparations were hastened, and the Captain and Archie inserted some bars on the inside of the door, so that it could not be opened without their

co-operation even though the natives wished to come in.

" I wonder if Dave can get in," Archie said to the Captain as they finished their work. " There may be other movable logs in this building, and if so I am sure he will find them."

" Hullo, the dog's here! " cried Mac. " He came through a hole in that end wall opposite. Lads, let's eat, drink, and sleep, and be thankful. Dave can lead us out when we want, an' maybe, when the folks who own this place are sleeping, we'll do some private exploring."

" Here's a chunk o' caribou, Dave," Stewart grunted, tossing the hungry animal a generous piece of half-smoked, half-roasted venison. " Ye're a vera intelligent dog, but I hope ye havena been a cannibal among these common quadrupeds ootside."

CHAPTER XIV

HOW TOO-MUCH-GOLD CREEK WAS REGAINED.

" Well, lads," spoke the Captain, lighting his pipe, " I think that is the best meal I have ever had, or am ever likely to have. We must be careful that we are not put out of this prison until we have served our full time."

Stewart heaved a sigh of satisfaction. " I'll no' let false modesty mak' me deny that we have fared sumptuously," he said, " an' I actually believe that the smoke we have swallowed has added a flavor to oor meal that a' the patent sauces o' ceevilized parts couldna hae done."

" I wish we could try Soapy's trick," remarked Kentucky Bill, " and cart this here shebang away with us on our sleigh."

" This is a dream o' perfect peace an' comfort," sighed Mac; " and I'll never be bad to niggers again; because this lot have behaved so well to us. You were quite right about your seeds o' hospitality, Stewart —— "

" Let us have a smoke an' get to sleep," Bill interrupted. " A good long sleep after this regular blowout of a feed will make us as fit for work as an Indian is for eating salmon. What do you say, Archie? "

But Archie did not answer. He and Dave were already fast asleep, the boy's head pillowed on his dog's furry body. In his dreams he was with his brother again, working to perfect Ralstons' Process. At length it was an accomplished fact, and he was sent out to superintend its first trials on a large scale. In a cloud of mist the scene changed, and Archie was standing in a cup-shaped snow-covered depression which somehow seemed familiar to him. The men around him too seemed to be almost a part of himself, and a great mastiff lay at his feet.

"This is the blamed place after all," one of his dream comrades said. "Blow me if I didn't think that the first time we passed through ——"

"We left in a hurry, if ye remember," another broke in. "We didn't like the company over in these totem houses on the slope."

"Who would hae thocht that the Klondike could ever become such a densely populated place as it is now," spoke another. "I mind when we were here first we were nearly dead o' starvation. Now a' the luxuries o' ceevilization can be bought doon in Dawson City."

The scene became blurred in a cloud of drifting snow, and when it cleared again the dreamer saw he was still in the same place. But what a change was there! The snow was no longer in evidence, but the entire crater hollow was covered by low wooden buildings, high above which rose poppet legs supporting huge revolving wheels. The whir of machinery filled the air, and the mountain slopes were tunnelled in every direction. Archie could not see, but he knew that underneath the ground, and

in these great tunnels, men were working, shift relieving shift, without ceasing, blowing out tons upon tons of wonderfully rich refractory auriferous ore which could only be successfully treated by the world-famous Ralstons' Process. And that method of ore treatment was now at work in the low wooden buildings which filled the valley.

"Ay, laddie," a voice spoke beside him, "Ralstons' Process has made the fortune o' everyone concerned with it, and done good to hundreds of honest miners whose claims would be useless to them if our works weren't here for extracting their gold for them. But the Captain can manage everything in the Klondike country now. We'll take the train tomorrow for the South, and go over to Australia to start the process there. Stewart, Broncho, and Kentucky are waitin' on us now. A long cable has just come in from your brother in Glasgow, too, saying that the Brazilian Government have offered to buy up the Brazilian rights o' the patent."

"All right, Mac," Archie seemed to answer; "and after we get the Process working in those countries we'll go off to New Guinea, or somewhere else, to look for more adventures such as we had while on the long trail when first we came in here — " He took a step forward and awoke, and slowly the knowledge came back to him that he and the comrades of his dream were prisoners in the hands of a strange people, and that Ralstons' Process was as yet nonexistent as a working concern, even the model entrusted to his care having been stolen. "And to think that it is somewhere in this village now," Archie groaned; "and we are helpless. I wonder,

though, if there is anything in dreams. No, there cannot be. My nerves are a bit unstrung, that's all. I'll tell Mac in the morning." He looked round and saw the forms of his comrades rolled in their blankets around the red embers. Someone had thrown his blanket over him while he slept, and Dave was still his pillow. Everyone was asleep, and turning over he too was soon back in dreamland again. But this time his visions were not of the future. His brain persisted in leading him back over the events of the day, and even in his dream mind he thought he was awake. Again with his comrades he crossed the snow-filled crater bed, broke into the totem house, and arrived at the village of the so-called Mongolians. Again the copper-colored princess spoke to him in a harsh voice, and in language meaningless to him. He saw through the designs of the apparently friendly tribesmen to capture the party, and tried to tell Mac, but somehow he could not make that usually astute individual understand, and in time the door of the strongly built prison again closed upon his comrades and himself. Then he missed Dave, and called for him, and in answer to his call the faithful animal came through a hole in the end of one of the walls and licked his hands.

"Why, I never thought of that, Dave," the dreamer exclaimed. "That hole through which you came must lead somewhere, for this seemed a much larger building from the outside than it looks from here. There must be a room adjoining. Maybe Ralstons' Process is hidden somewhere near. Come and we'll investigate." Dave was quite agreeable,

and together they passed through the pivoted-log passage and found themselves, as he had expected, in another room, in which were hundreds of weirdly carved idols, and many wooden representations of animals and fishes.

" This must be a totem house also, Dave," he said to the dog, " and it proves, as Mac most likely would tell us, that the people whose prisoners we are dwelt for a long time on the coast either of Alaska or Kamchatka, and these images are the old totems of their various tribes before they moved inland and substituted totem houses for their poles."

Dave did not seem to care whether the people had come from the planet Mars or from New York, nor did he show any enthusiasm when informed of the customs of the coastal tribes in using totem poles, on the top of which were mounted the animals selected by the tribe in question as most fitted for their representation. Instead, he was chiefly concerned in pushing forward to where a raised platform loomed through the darkness in the centre of the room, on which rested an oblong box of mysterious appearance.

" That is the white man's joss," Archie muttered; then, light dawning on him as he saw the projecting wires and terminal screws, and noted the railway labels pasted promiscuously over the sides, he cried: " Why, it is the stolen model! It is Ralstons' Process! " He sprang towards the box which contained the result of his brother's brain efforts and his own handiwork, and — awoke!

" Another dream only! " he gasped feebly, as he once more realized that he was lying with his com-

rades around the remnants of their fire, with Dave for a pillow. " Surely I am not ill? "

The perspiration was streaming from his face, and he sat up and tried to think. " What a remarkable sequence of dreams," he murmured. " I ought to have known not to eat so much at night. Hallo, Dave! are you awake too? By Jove! Suppose we just go and have a look at where you came through. It is strange we never thought of inquiring into that matter before."

The sagacious dog jumped up at once and wagged its tail encouragingly, and, seeing that his matches were all right, Archie unwound himself from his blanket and stood up. Next moment he stepped over Mac and Kentucky Bill, and moved towards the hole Dave had discovered, as he had done in his dream. The firelight was sufficient to enable him to see things fairly distinctly, and, laying some pieces of timber on top of each other, he stood on the pile thus made and swung himself up into the hole, followed immediately by Dave. But it was dark in the apartment in which he now found himself, and the idols of his dream could not be seen. That they were there, however, he felt sure; but he was now as little interested in them as Dave had been formerly, and moved forward cautiously to where he knew the raised platform and the white man's joss marked the centre of the chamber. " It is strange how I could see everything in my dream," he muttered. " I do hope I am not dreaming again." He stumbled over something as he spoke, and the sharp twinge of pain that followed assured him on that point. But his hands had touched some-

thing when he fell, and a wild thrill ran through his entire being. He knew he had touched the stolen box, for his fingers had come into contact with the terminals in one of its ends. Trembling with excitement, he picked himself up and struck a light, then with a cry of joy threw himself down again upon the object over which he had stumbled. It was the stolen working model of Ralstons' Process. His journey over the long white trail had been inspired by Providence after all. With a strength born of joy and thankfulness he seized the box and dragged it along the rough floor towards the hole. He knocked over many idols in passing, but he cared not. He had the white man's joss. and it was greater than all the images of cats, birds, and fish that littered the place. He reached the swinging log that gave admittance to the division in which his comrades were sleeping, but here his common sense came to the rescue, and, instead of attempting to hoist the box through the hole himself, he cried softly, " Mac, come and help me. I've got the stolen model! "

In an instant the four men sat upright. " What's wrong with you, laddie? " Mac cried. " I've been listening to you rummaging among totems for these last ten minutes. You shouldn't disturb gods like that. You might get your clothes smeared with salmon oil or some other smelliferous stuff that is more useful for keeping you warm than it is pleasant."

" Come awa' doon and gang to sleep," advised Stewart. " Ye ought to be glad ye hae a warm bed the nicht, for ma unfailin' instinct tells

me the temperature is doon below sixty oot-side."

"I've found the Process!" Archie again cried. "Come and help me lower it down."

"You've found the affair Soapy stole?" yelled Bill, springing up beside Archie. "Blow me for a fat-headed galoot, I had forgotten all about the white man's joss! Where is it? Let me get my telescopes on it and I'll mesmerize it." But Bill didn't get any opportunity to show his powers. All the men had followed him, and already Mac and Stewart, who recognized the much-travelled case at once, were fastening ropes round it preparatory to lowering it to their own apartment. And this was soon done. Then, still greatly excited, Archie told the story of his dreams. "They were all so real, too," he said in conclusion, "that I fear I am dreaming again now, and that I shall awake presently and find you all sleeping around me."

"Ye can rest easy on that matter, laddie," said Stewart, packing the case, so strangely recovered, on the sleigh, "an' in half a meenit I'll gie ye some hot coffee that will warm ye a' the way doon, an' mak' ye feel awake frae the bristles on yer bonnet to the soles o' ye moccasins."

"Archie, my laddie," said Mac, "allow me to give you my heartiest congratulations. Since the first moment I saw you I felt that Providence had put you in my care, but I never thought that the end of the long trail would bring us to your invention. Our work up in this place is done now, and the sooner we get back to Too-much-gold Creek, and send that misguided man Soapy Sam about his

business, the sooner will Ralstons' Process be working in that crater."

"Yes, let's away now," cried the impulsive American. "Hang it! I feel as if someone had left me a million dollars on condition that I should spend them."

"Archie, I am glad," spoke the Captain quietly, "and whether the rest of your dream comes true or not I will stand by you as long as I am on top, and every cent I possess is at your disposal for giving the process a trial. We don't need to get financed by any big capitalists."

"That's the way to talk, Captain," cried Mac. "Too-much-gold Creek will provide the funds."

"And puir auld Stewart will mak' another pudden to celebrate everything when we smite that iniquitous sinner Soapy Samuel as the Hebrew smote the — the —— "

"Philistines, Stewart," Mac assisted. "Surely you're no forgettin'? "

"No, I'm no forgettin,' Mac," retorted the wily one; "and I wasna thinkin' o' things that happened in a place stuck awa' at the far end o' the Mediterranean afore you or me were born. My mind was on present-day Hebrews — the shent per shent kind — an' I was proposin' to dae wi' Soapy as they dae wi' whoever gets into their clutches. In short, an' to speak so that you can grasp my meanin', we'll mak' Soapy pay heavy interest for the time he has had Ralstons' Process in hand."

"But we've got to get out of this place first," reminded Archie. "How are we to manage that? "

"The same way as the dog got in," answered the

Captain. " It's not midnight yet, and we've plenty of time."

" No use," cried Mac, standing in the totem collection room. " Dave came in through the chief's house. It adjoins this totem museum; an' we could never get our sleigh out that way even if his copper-skinned majesty offered no objection to our making a public highway o' his best drawin'-room. We'll blow a hole in the wall wi' dynamite."

" Can't risk that, Mac," the Captain said gravely. " We'd probably blow the place about our heads, and have no further interest in either the process or Too-much-gold Creek."

" I'll give you the ticket," Bill said. " Get Stewart to sing a song, an' when the niggers come along to see who is gettin' killed we'll talky-talky them."

" My man," began Stewart angrily, " my voice is vera highly trained an' —— "

" You are quite right, Stewart," Archie put in in the cause of peace. " These people haven't a taste to appreciate anything high class."

" Let's set fire to the place," suggested Stewart. " We can stand a bit roastin' gey weel, I'm thinkin', an' when the timber begins to come doon we can break through."

" Why not chop our way through that door with our axes? " enquired Archie. " We could do that, I'm sure, and if the natives came we should just have to conciliate them, or fight them — Hallo! What was that? I heard something outside that door."

A growl from the ever-attentive Dave showed that

he too had heard something, and all listened intently for further indications of anyone's presence outside.

" Wha's there," Stewart bellowed at length, " an' what richt hae you to disturb prisoners at this time o' nicht? "

" White man go 'way. No' go he die," a thick guttural voice replied from outside. " Fawn Eyes here help white man."

" Blow me tight if it ain't the ugly princess," cried Bill. " Speak fair to her, Stewart, for the sake of the Process. Tell her you'll marry her."

" It must be gey cauld out there," Stewart answered, ignoring Bill's remarks. " I presume ye have come to mak' terms for our release? Let us ken them an' we'll tak' the matter to avizandum."

" Fawn Eyes no' know what you say. Go 'way."

" That's all vera well, my bonnie wee lassie," replied Mac; " but there are some serious obstacles which have a vera material influence in preventing us from catchin' the first train away from the district."

" You talky talky too muchy too. Go! Fawn Eyes no' wait longer."

" Haud on a wee, Miss Fawn Eyes," implored Stewart in what he thought was an irrestible voice. " Dinna leave us without saying goodbye."

" Ugh! Where sun-eyed snow-skin brave? "

" That's you, Archie," said the Captain. " Speak to her."

" How do you do, Princess? " Archie called through the door. " I am sorry we are not in a position to entertain you —— "

" Ugh. Me no' know what you say, but you no

heap big fool like other squaw warriors. You know 'nough go 'way. Fawn Eyes say. She like you. No' forget."

"By the Stars and Stripes!" exclaimed Bill. "She is telling you pretty straight, boy, that she likes you so well that she wants you to escape. Tell her to open the door."

"I needn't trouble," Archie replied, flinging down the barricades inside. "She does not understand what we say, and has already made it clear to us. although she has not said so in English, that we are fools if we do not go away. I expect she has unfastened the door."

"You no' forget Fawn Eyes? She go 'way now. Never see you. She heap big princess —— "

Just then Bill and Stewart threw down the last log of their own barricade, and the door flew open. The Captain, Mac, and Archie stepped out into the freezing atmosphere and saw Fawn Eyes with the last wooden bar which fastened the door outside still in her hands. She dropped it instantly and turned to run away, but Mac caught her gently.

"Just come back, my lassie," he said kindly. "You're maybe not so very pleasing to our tastes, but your heart is in the right place, an' I'm not sure that a Mongolian heart is not just as good as any other. Come back an' see what we've got for you."

"Don't keep her standing here, Mac," cried Archie. "She'll freeze despite those furs she is wearing."

"No fear o' that, laddie; that odoriferous salmon-oil coating she is varnished with keeps out the cold.

But give her something. She will appreciate any little thing that's of no use to you."

"Please take this as a little memento," Archie said, handing her his watch. "I am very sorry that it won't go in this climate of yours, but no doubt it will be just as serviceable."

"An' jest hitch on to this from me," cried Kentucky Bill, producing a pipe from some recess in his garments. "It is a mighty good smoker but it is too blamed heavy on tobacco for this part of the world."

The princess accepted both presents with a cry of delight, and looked at Mac, Stewart, and the Captain to see what they were going to give.

"You've started an expensive sort of game, Archie," the Captain laughed, taking a small folding mirror from an inside pocket. "Take this from me, Princess," he said. "I once used it to show myself how handsome I was, but it hurts even Stewart to look at me now, so I dare not look in the glass."

"And remember to use it vera sparingly yourself," advised Mac. "You're not exactly what a self-respecting mirror has been used to, and I'll not say what might happen if you looked in that one too long. But here is my present, an' seeing you don't know a word I'm saying I'll show you what it is."

It was a box of matches, and, gravely lighting one to show the nature of his gift, he handed her the box.

"Ye've been vera inconsiderate o' me in the lavishness o' your generosity," grumbled Stewart. "But I'll mak' you turn green wi' envy yet, you

beggars. Here, Princess, tak' this in remembrance o' Stewart — mind the way my name's spelt if ye're ever writin' to me. It's for eatin', an' you can hang the bonnie wee bottle round yer neck when you've feenished its contents." He placed a small phial of saccharine in the hands of the princess, and smiled serenely, and when the recipient of his gift promptly put one of the sweet tabloids in her mouth his triumph was complete.

"You give best, ugly fellow." the princess said "Me give now too. You fellows no forget me?"

"Not for a long time," hurriedly answered Bill, who saw Stewart's danger signal rising. "We'll write at every port we call in at."

"You flat-faced, frozen-nosed, evil-smellin' missin' link!" burst out Stewart, addressing the princess: "hae ye actually the indecency to tell me to my face that I'm no' the maist handsome man ye ever saw? Efter me givin' ye enough saccharine to mak' ye ill for a week. My guid woman, I would hae ye to ken that I'm what the joggraphy book calls an Adonis."

"Shut up, you gomeril," sternly reproved Mac. "The temperature is still falling, an' we've got to be down on the Klondike before mornin'. Catch up the rope an' get a move on. Goodbye, Fawn Eyes!"

"Fawn Eyes give too," rejoined the princess, presenting Archie with a pair of solid silver bangles slipped from her arm. "You squaw men," she continued with great candor, "take caribou an' go 'way. Fawn Eyes go now."

"An' by the Mississippi she's gone!" ejaculated Bill. "Come on, boys, hitch on to the caribou we've been presented with for being beautiful, and let us

make tracks for our happy home on Too-much-gold Creek."

" An' come here this meenit, Dave," cried Stewart. " You ought to know better than to follow a princess. Come back to your work at once."

Dave returned and took his accustomed place, apparently much surprised at the tone of Stewart's command, shortly the sleigh was once more in motion, and this time it was headed back over the tracks it had made only some twelve hours previously.

" It is mighty funny that none of these blamed yellowskins didn't get up to see what all the noise was about," Bill remarked, as they began to rise over the divide towards the Klondike headwaters.

" You would as soon wake the population of a totem house as a native of these latitudes when once he gets rolled in his skins for the night," said the Captain; " that is, unless you kindled a fire under him."

" I wonder if Princess Fawn Eyes will get into trouble over our escape? " Archie asked. " Perhaps we should have contrived to make it appear that we broke out ourselves."

" Don't worry, Archie," Mac said. " The lassie knew what she was doin', and I have little doubt is well able to look after herself. All the same, I'll have a soft side to the yellow fellows after this, for her sake."

" Pull, ye mis-ogynists, pull, an' don't waste your wind speakin'," gasped Stewart. " Dae you think me an' the dog are elephants? "

" Yes, lads, let's get over the pass and into the

dead men's cañon as soon as possible," the Captain said.

" An', by the fellow who couldn't tell a lie, we'll camp and have breakfast on the spot where Ralstons' Process is going to be set working," cried Bill. " Maybe we'll find traces of the refractory gold deposits it's going to treat."

" I'm thinkin' we've struck on Soapy Sam's idea of stealin' the patent now," Mac put in. " He knew of this strange auriferous formation that Archie dreamt about, and thought he would have no more to do than set the box o' wires and metal plates down beside it, and the gold would be drawn out of the rocks as if by some new kind o' magnet."

" That fact also accounts for the model being left among his Mongolians," Archie said. " Very likely a party of them have gone down to look for Soapy to-night, to tell them we are prisoners in their hands."

" Lads, ye'll need to gie me time to get my carver in guid cuttin' order afore we drap on the fellow. I wadna like to bungle the job o' slicin' him into steaks —— "

" Not another word, Stewart," roared Mac. " You are harrowing the tender feelings o' the dog, and I know Archie doesn't like your mode o' expression either."

" We're near the top of the range," Archie interrupted. " I can see where the snowline ends in the darkness."

" I'm no' goin' to waste ony mair chunks o' wisdom on the non-appreciative members o' this scientific expedition," murmured Stewart. " My face cracks every time I open my mouth —— "

" Then keep it shut," advised Kentucky Bill unsympathetically, and curiously enough Stewart did so. The party soon reached the top of the divide, and two hours later were traversing the crater hollow in which were the totem houses. A brief halt was made here while the Captain and Bill climbed to a shelf of rock free from snow, and broke off some pieces. Archie examined them carefully by candlelight, and expressed the opinion that they carried gold.

" We'll test them when daylight comes," he said as all gathered round the blazing logs Mac and he had kindled, to partake of hot coffee. " This is the very place I saw twice in my dreams."

And when, just as they were ready to start again, the sun shot up behind some distant nameless snow-clad peaks to the south-east, he crushed the specimen rocks to a fine powder and assayed the result carefully. " It is as I thought," he said, when the operation was completed; " these rocks are shot heavily with gold, but it is so refractory that, so far as I know, only Ralstons' Process could treat it profitably."

" Then let us get down to Too-much-gold Creek again," cried the Captain. " We can get the sinews of war there, and if the Klondike is rushed, as seems highly probable, in the spring, we can then employ all the men who cannot find gold for themselves to erect the Process on a working scale."

" No' another meal will I cook until we reach within strikin' distance o' oor auld camp," said Stewart. " I'm just burnin', even in this temperature to get my fingers on some mair o' these bonnie

ironstone-like nuggets which will gie us the means o' starting Ralstons' Process up here when we like."

"We won't need another meal," rejoined Mac. "Our road is all downhill from here, and we should see Too-much-gold Creek before night comes on again."

And he was nearly correct. When the sun went down, about half-past two in the afternoon, the outjutting spur, behind which Too-much-gold Creek joined the Klondike, loomed straight ahead, and an hour's steady travelling in the darkness brought them to the junction. Here a camp was made, and supper prepared, after which all went to sleep, the intention being to move on early in the morning, and take Soapy as much as possible by surprise. Before Stewart rolled himself in his blanket, however, he devoted ten minutes to stropping his beloved knife on his right and his left boot alternately.

"That's a gran' piece o' steel, Bill," he remarked after trying the edge with his thumb. "Mony a whale it has cut up. I mind when I bought it in Dundee, an' I wouldna part wi' it now for anything, unless, maybe," he added reservedly, "a guid square meal o' beans an' bacon."

"I don't put much count on a knife," Bill answered as he coiled himself up. "It seems a bit too greaser-like to carve a fellow with steel. But let me have my little barker, an' I'll blow the roof off any cuss before he could think on what his first name was."

"I quite believe you, Bill," Stewart grunted; "but personally I am o' opinion that there's naething like cauld steel. A man can often miss wi' a

pea shooter, but there's nae missin' wi' a blade like this, an' I'm thinkin' Soapy should feel highly honored at gettin' the privilege o' havin' his banes shaved wi' it."

Bill did not answer; he was asleep, and, soon after, Stewart finished his work and lay down beside him.

About midnight there was a movement among the blankets, and Mac sat up quietly. " I'll just have a look at the field o' battle," he muttered to himself. " It is as well to be as much prepared against contingencies as is in our power, especially when it's men like Soapy Samuel, Chilcoot Charlie, & Co. who are playing the other hand." He rose, and, seizing his favorite gun, stepped out of the tent and started up the creek towards the old camp. But he had not gone far when a dog's cold nose was pushed into his hand, and, looking down, he saw Dave beside him. " You're a fine dog, Dave," he said, " but you are as much needing a sleep as any o' us, an' should have waited where you were comfortable."

" If there is any game on, Mac, Dave and I are going to have a hand in it," said a voice behind him, and next moment Archie swung alongside. "I saw you leaving," the lad continued, " and came after you. What purpose have you in view, Mac? You may as well tell me, for I am quite determined that I am going with you to take my share of all risks."

" To which sentiments I, as a free-born citizen of the great United States of America, also sign my name," said Kentucky Bill. " There ain't goin' to be any solo parts in this here racket, Mac."

"I should think not," said the Captain's voice.

"Come on then," said Mac, looking round and seeing Stewart also in the party. "It appears to me that we have each struck upon the same idea, for I don't believe you were all so curious about my movements as to be lying awake watchin' me."

"What is your idea then, Mac?" said the Captain.

"I wanted to stretch my legs a bit."

"Dinna mak' the man tell lees," broke in Stewart. "He wanted to be the first man in oor ain palatial mansion, which, if Soapy didna burn it, should be standin' in a' its architectural glory aboot a couple o' hundred yards up the creek. We a' intended the same thing, so let us just mak' a picnic o' the business noo an' creep up in the dark wi' nothing but oor fightin' tools."

"That, I confess, was my idea," said the Captain.

"Of course," observed Mac, "we had all the same inspiration. Great minds think alike. But don't waste time talking. We've got business on hand that may prove vera easy or extremely difficult."

But it was ridiculously simple. They merely marched up the frozen surface of the creek and took possession of their hut without the slightest show of opposition, and soon after they had also brought along their sleigh and tent, and were sitting round a glowing stove discussing their best mode of procedure. Meanwhile the inmates of the portable hut on the opposite bank apparently slept as soundly as though the Government had granted them a perpetual lease of Too-much-gold Creek.

"Well, boys," said the Captain, "I suppose we

have all thought out some plan of action. I remember, when we left here, Bill and Stewart thought I cried off fighting; but this is my proposal now. We'll ask Soapy to remove in the morning, and if he doesn't, we'll just make him. We ——"

"No good, Cap," put in Bill. "They'd simply sit tight in their little fort, an' we could never get a chance to fight them. I thought we might trick them out some way."

"I propose we blow them out wi' dynamite," grunted Stewart. "It's the only sure way."

"Stewart," cried Mac, "you are a man after my own heart. That idea has been in my mind all the time."

"But how can we do that?" Archie asked. "They will not sit idly and watch us."

"They'll no' see us, laddie," Stewart answered. "Mac an' me will attend to the business, an' we never mak' mistakes. We'll just open up oor shaft, and slide down an' oot under the frozen creek until we reach their place. Four plugs o' gelignite, placed scientifically in the ice under their hut, wi' a decent length o' fuse, will just aboot do the trick. It will chase them oot anyway, an' after that we can dae what seems best."

All agreed with Stewart's proposal, and without loss of time a start was made to carry it out.

"Our friends have been in here," Archie remarked as the movable boards of the floor were lifted, "but evidently they suspected nothing or our shaft would have been opened."

"They could have removed our barricade under the ice and stolen our stores," Mac said; "but I'll

wager a fair-sized nugget that neither Soapy nor his satellites ever saw the bottom o' the shaft they anchored over. Hard work is not in their line of business."

And so it proved. When Mac and Stewart crossed under the ice to lay the mine which was to disturb the inmates of the house above, they found that all things were exactly as they had left them, and that a flooring had now been put in the hut, thus covering the shaft.

Before morning everything was ready, but they delayed firing the mine until they had fixed up their own hut so that it could stand a siege, if need arose. Shortly after breakfast Dave announced, in characteristic fashion, that someone was approaching, and on their going to the door Soapy Sam himself confronted them.

He grinned cheerfully. "Got back again?" he said. "Hope you had a good trip."

"Fair," the Captain answered. "Are you coming inside?"

"Not just now. I ain't no all-fired idiot yet."

"No, I suppose not," spoke Mac, pushing Stewart back into the hut. "You're just the real and original Soapy, and think that because you would murder a man yourself, if you got him cornered, every other man would do the same."

"You've got no call to say things like that to me. I am the most peaceably inclined man who ever washed a pan, an' if I weren't I would tell my boys to wipe ye out without givin' ye any chance. As it is, they are comin' for ye pretty quick whenever they have breakfast; an' if ye have any savvy left

ye will say goodbye to Too-much-gold Creek right away."

"'Puir, peaceful, lamblike Soapy, how I hae misjudged him," said Stewart within. He would have liked to remind Soapy of his promise to fight, but another idea struck him just then, and he dropped down the shaft in the middle of the floor.

" Well, we ain't goin'," said Kentucky Bill shortly.

" You won't go? " cried Soapy. " Then, blow you for tenderfeet! I can do no more for ye, an' ye're now lookin' at your last sunrise."

" Bet you all you're worth you're a liar, an' that you will leave here first," shouted Bill, as Stewart reappeared and nodded significantly.

" Please don't go away just yet," Archie put in, as Soapy turned to depart in anger. " We have a little surprise for you if you will only wait a few moments."

" What is it? " asked the peaceably inclined man. But, before any answer could be given, a dull rumble sounded somewhere under the ice in the creek, and great crystal-like masses were heaved into the air in the vicinity of Soapy's hut. At the same time the heavily-logged edifice itself jerked several feet upwards, snapping the ropes which had moored it to the bank as if they had been straws. For an instant the house seemed to waver, then, slowly moving forward on its runners, it gathered speed as it took the sharp descent into the frozen channel and skidded merrily down towards the Klondike River.

CHAPTER XV

THE SUMMONS

"WHOOP LA! There she goes!" roared Bill, taking off his bearskin cap and waving it in boisterous farewell, a proceeding which all but Soapy emulated with cheerful promptitude.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" cried Archie in a transport of delight, watching the vanishing stronghold with sparkling eyes. Stewart shouted himself hoarse; then, unable to contain himself, dexterously indulged in the wild mazes of the Highland Fling. Even the Captain, usually most staid in demeanor, could not resist joining in the mad tumult of applause that greeted the downward course of the abhorred structure. Mac, however, restricted his joyful manifestations to a grim smile of satisfaction, and kept careful watch on Soapy Sam, who appeared thunderstruck at the startling event which had happened.

Long before the giant sleigh had reached the Klondike, its wildly shrieking inmates had leaped for safety, and now they lined the creek bank, chattering volubly, and gazing helplessly after their disappearing home. Then the frenzied curses of Chilcoot Charlie were let loose upon the air; that fluent-tongued individual was apparently much distressed by the trend of circumstances, and his fierce

invective was most potent in its fury. Hurrying up over the icy slopes he came, a revolver brandishing in each hand, his evil face purple with demoniacal rage.

And all this time Soapy had never said a word; indeed he appeared to see the humor of the situation, for the shadow of a smile lingered around his thin lips. But when Stewart addressed him in language of exaggerated condolence he turned round savagely:

"You've got no call to shout out yet," he snarled. "It will only be the worse for you at the finish."

"But we are law-abiding citizens," remarked the Captain glibly. "We're squatted on the ground and you're not, and if you try to rush us we'll report you to the Government."

As near as he could remember the Captain had quoted Soapy's own words spoken on the occasion of his first arrival.

Soapy Sam laughed harshly. "I'm not takin' any count o' the peace racket," said he. "It ain't good enough for this hyer country. The solid facts o' the matter are: we're two thousand miles outside o' the law. There ain't no law in the Klondike. There's five o' ye here to hold the creek, but I reckon I can bring ten times five to boost ye out o' it ——"

Just then Chilcoot arrived on the scene. "Say, are ye goin' to git, or do you want us to turn the gang on to ye?" he hissed, essaying to raise his revolvers threateningly.

"By all means turn on the gang," Mac murmured gently. "But in case the guns you carry might

explode, you'd better lay them carefully down on the ice before you start."

"I'll see you hanged first ——"

"Put 'em down, you fool," ordered Soapy shortly; "don't you see they have got you covered."

"Oh, they've skeered you, have they?" taunted the infuriated one, turning on his associate with a sneering laugh. "Why don't the famous Soapy put up a fight —— ?"

"Because he's got more sense than you," answered Mac, making a sudden spring forward and encircling Chilcoot Charlie in his brawny arms, so that the wavering revolvers were included in the powerful grasp and became pinioned helplessly to the ruffian's sides. The Captain promptly disarmed the struggling man, who, indeed, was as a weakly child in his captor's clutches.

"It's a strange thing," said Archie indignantly, "that these people should trade so much on our unwillingness to hurt them unless in fair fight."

Mac hurled Chilcoot Charlie from him with scarce an effort. "It is the way o' the world, Archie," said he calmly; then his voice grew stern: "Now then, Soapy, you'd better get out after your friend ——"

"Ay, git, afore I pulverize you," added Stewart, edging nearer to his sworn enemy.

"You kin bet I ain't goin' to stay — meantime," returned Soapy slowly and significantly. "But you ought to see you won't have a chance o' holdin' the ground ——"

"Send along your gang," growled Bill; "we'll fill 'em so full o' lead I reckon they won't want to stay nuther."

"I kin afford to lose a few o' them in the scrimmage," said Soapy casually; "and when I come again I reckon you'll find it healthier to git instanter."

He strode off with his discomfited companion, turning back once to give a final word of cheerful advice: "Stake out the corners ye'd like to be planted in, boys; an' when you're at it you might do worse'n write your epitaph. I'll give you a specimen that has been used more'n once." He took a notebook from his pocket, tore out a leaf, and wrote some words thereon with the leaden end of a revolver cartridge. With a grating laugh he threw the sheet on the ice, and continued on his way to join the yellow fraternity who awaited his coming some few hundred yards farther down the creek.

Archie went forward and picked up the paper. It bore only two lines, but they were wonderfully suggestive:

"I FELL FOUL O' SOAPY SAM.
HERE I AM."

"Friend Soapy is evidently a bit o' a humorist," remarked Mac drily when the effusion was read out. "But a man who can joke on such a subject is capable o' anything. Look to your rifles, lads, and let us be ready."

"I think if we got inside the hut we could stand a pretty solid siege," suggested the Captain, "After all, there is no advantage to be gained by remaining out in the open to be potted at promiscuously."

"Why, they're not coming back!" exclaimed Archie wonderingly. "See, they're fixing up the runaway house just where it stuck!"

" H'm, that's strange," grunted Mac. " I suppose they mean to attack us in the night."

Shortly afterwards another surprise greeted them. Soapy Sam with several of the aliens was seen issuing forth on the trail up the Klondike in great haste.

" He is going for reinforcements, probably," said Archie sadly. " He doesn't mean to leave us alone after all."

" I wonder how many he wants for the job?" muttered Bill in disgust. " Ain't a round dozen o' the critters enough for him? "

Notwithstanding their somewhat anxious position, Mac coolly proposed that the work of mining should be proceeded with straightway. " We can count on three or four days o' grace before Soapy can get back from the village, lads," he said; " and in that time we can scoop out the best o' the surface wash. I shouldn't wonder if we managed to scrape things pretty clean before Soapy starts the circus again."

They went to their work with a will, taking the precaution, however, to keep a watch on top, and Archie and Dave took the first spell of this rather onerous duty. The lad was by no means satisfied at the near proximity of his neighbors, and he kept a strict lookout in their direction as he patrolled backwards and forwards over the ice in vain endeavor to infuse some warmth into his system. Now and again he could distinguish Chilcoot Charlie's swarthy face peering up at him, and on one occasion he observed that individual in the midst of a gesticulating throng of his myrmidons, who seemed to be clamoring for something in no uncertain voice.

Then, to his horror, he saw knives drawn, and angry murmurs reached his ears. " It will go hard with Chilcoot Charlie if they do turn on him. I suppose Soapy is the only man who can hold them in check." Even as he was speaking he saw the white man's rifle flash in the dull sunlight, and at once the surrounding horde scattered in apparently abject terror.

The forenoon passed without further happening; then the Captain relieved him at his post, while he went down below to hew at the frozen gravel. Great was the treasure they recovered from the golden creek that day. Nuggets of wonderful size were revealed when the stones were subjected to the roasting process, and Archie thought that, if the same reward was theirs for three full days, their greatest trouble would be to carry the wealth away. But this was expecting over much from Nature. The second day was disappointing compared with the first, and on the third evening Mac considered that it would be necessary to treat the sands of the creek more systematically if they would avoid having to sink a new shaft.

" I don't think we should sink any more holes," said the Captain; " at least until we see what Soapy intends to do."

Mac concurred readily enough. " The fact is," he remarked, " I believe we've got pretty nearly all that can be got without sluicing the wash; but what we've taken is nothing to what might be dug out with more careful treatment."

" Anyhow," commented Archie brightly, " the creek has done well by us, and we can't grumble.

Why, there's nearly three thousand ounces in the pile now! At £4 an ounce that means about £12,000 altogether."

"There's iron in it, Archie," said Mac. "You'll be safer to reckon on a value of three pounds an ounce."

"I reckon if we got the process set ajigging it would sizzle out gold like sawdust through a sieve," murmured Bill reflectively. "If Too-much-gold can give us enough to run up a plant I won't want any more."

"Billy, my man," said Stewart earnestly, "I am very delighted to hear you speak in such moderate terms. Gold is a curse, you ken, an' brings in its train a' evil things. Noo, that's ex-actly why I'm such a paragon o' virtue."

"Wealth, if used aright, is a blessing," spoke Mac gravely; "misapplied, it is the bitterest enemy o' those that possess it. Gold, the yellow sordid gold o' commerce, has always its worldly value; but remember, lads, the gold o' human nature is above all price, and we who seek for the former sometimes find the latter, so that our quest is often glorified in failure."

"You're gettin' gey lang-winded, as I've had occasion to remark before," murmured Stewart thoughtfully. "Forbye, you speak in parables, which is a vera dangerous form o' discourse — " He sighed abstractedly. "I wish I were a prod — prod — prodigal," he continued, diverging off from the subject at a tangent. "But there'll be nae fatted calf for me. Hooever, I never did like calf."

"I think we'll manage to make one calf go round,"

said Archie, laughing. "I wonder whether we should have our feast in New York or Glasgow?"

"If I get a ghost o' a say in the matter," chuckled Bill, "we'll have a bit of a blow-out in Seattle to start wi'. This hyer prodigal ain't going' to take any risks."

"I don't suppose it's any good remindin' ye all about the chickens," said the Captain.

"Ay, Cap'n, I'm vera partial to chicken," admitted Stewart hastily. "We'll no' forget."

"Those I have in my mind were never hatched," proceeded the Captain imperturbably. "You've got to remember, boys, we aren't any too healthily fixed this very moment."

"We rise superior to circumstance," quoted Stewart suavely.

It was approaching nine o'clock, and darkness had covered the land for full six hours. At intervals Archie, accompanied by Dave, had gone out to see that no danger threatened from their enemies, and now he went forth for a final survey of the vicinity before retiring to bed. The Mongol camp could be dimly discerned in the pale light of the stars, and all was quiet. "I wonder if they've gone to sleep?" said the youth. "I think I'll venture down a little way and investigate." Off he went, Dave trotting obediently at his heels. He had covered half the distance down to the main river when he became suddenly conscious of a dark figure standing in the shadows of the creek bank, motionless as a statue, and scarce two yards away. He had no time to think of probable consequences, and at the moment he forgot too that he carried a heavy revolver in his

hand. Simultaneously with his sight of the man he sprang forward to grapple with him, and his sullen adversary met him half-way with ponderous club upraised to strike. But Archie had been too quick for him, his lithe body evaded the descending blow, and with a keen thrill of delight he felt a wonderful strength surge within him as his arms clenched on his foe. For a space they struggled in silence, then a furry thunderbolt hurled through the air straight at Archie's opponent's throat. Without even a preliminary growl Dave had leaped into the fray. With a deep guttural exclamation the man staggered back, just missing the shock. "Ugh!" he grunted. He did not attempt to renew the encounter, but kept a watchful eye on the dog.

"Why, you're an Indian!" said Archie breathlessly. "Why didn't you say so at first?"

Doubtless the Indian could have explained satisfactorily in his own language that his opportunities for speech at the commencement had been rather forcibly restricted, but his command of English was too meagre to express his feelings.

"Me Thron-Diuck warrior," he said. "Me watch yellow men."

Not another word could Archie get out of him, and, after making a few placable attempts to soothe the warrior's outraged dignity, he warily continued on his way, keeping closer into the gloom of the gully's steep sides as he neared the abode of the aliens. He was within twenty paces of the dangerous citadel when he halted and peered around anxiously. A faint disturbing element filled the air, but what it was he could not well determine. For

over a minute he stood, immovable, alert, then Dave pushed against his knee energetically and stifled the growl in his throat with apparent effort. Yet still Archie listened, his ears trying to fathom the unwonted sound he heard. Suddenly the door of the hut opened, and Chilcoot Charlie stepped out, mumbling fiercely to himself. "Why in thunder don't Soapy come?" he muttered audibly. "But hullo! that must be him now." His gaze was turned up the Klondike, and to Archie's alarm the mysterious echoes of the night were quickly explained, for through the half-light which glimmered on the frozen river he could now discern a dense black mass approaching. It was Soapy Sam returning with reinforcements from the village. The march of moccasined feet on the crisp frost was the disquieting sound he had heard. Quickly he turned and made his way back, and as he passed the scene of his encounter he noticed that the stolid Indian watcher was no longer there; he had vanished utterly.

He found his comrades anxiously awaiting him. "You've been too reckless, Archie," reproved Mac when they had listened to his story.

"I wonder what the Indian was doing there?" mused the Captain.

"Bothered if I think it matters a cent's worth what he was doing," said Bill, "but I'm mighty anxious to know what sort o' army Soapy has round about him. Have ye any idea as to their numbers, Archie?"

"I should say there would be over twenty in the bunch I saw," said the lad.

"That means there will be thirty in all, counting

those that remained," considered the Captain aloud.

"Oh, why did I no' stay up at the North Pole?" pathetically moaned Stewart. "Why did I leave my hame? God Save the Queen and Scots Wha Hae! this is nae place for a tender innocent at a'."

"There's one thing I'm convinced about," said Archie, after some further talk, "and that is that Soapy Sam's gang are very much afraid of firearms."

"By the Great Dominion, you've explained the whole concern!" cried the Captain. "Now that I think of it, I never saw any of them with a shooter. I do believe it is because Soapy daren't trust them with deadly weapons."

"Either that or he hasn't got any to spare," agreed Mac, "which comes to the same thing as far as we are concerned."

"An' that's why he needs such a crowd o' the critters," echoed Bill. "Blow me if I don't believe Soapy has been trying to bluff us every time."

"There must be more than bluff behind this new game of his," warned the Captain; "and the question is, are we going to give way to Soapy Sam or are we going to sit tight?"

Then did Stewart get up with a bellow of wrath.

"We'll give way to nae man," he shouted, "least of a' to Soapy!" And he but spoke the sentiment of all.

Through the long night they kept strict watch, but though noisy demonstrations issued continuously from the Mongol camp during the weary hours, no attempt was made to attack the creek defenders. Daylight came at last, and with it there broke forth

a wilder clamor from the awaiting gang. Their cries rang out fierce and harsh on the morning air, and occasionally Soapy Sam's voice could be heard calming the uproar.

" In case o' accident," said Mac, listening to the unruly tumult, " we'd better get everything packed on the sleigh in readiness for a hurried skedaddle if need be. I've got a sort o' idea that Soapy has been filling his crowd full o' firewater, an' they'll be more like beasts than human beings when they give us the pleasure o' their company."

Silently Archie assisted in making everything in order. Not for an instant did he doubt that a terrible ordeal was near, and he nerved himself to meet it. And Dave, growling hoarsely, followed him in all his movements, as if eager ever to be near to guard him from sudden attack. Breakfast was swallowed in haste, each man standing by his rifle, and ere it was finished a shrill pæan of triumph, the war song of the tribesmen, burst out in hideous chorus. The invaders were approaching in their might. The fated hour was at hand.

Archie rushed to the door of the hut and looked out. Far down the creek a hustling, jostling throng was steadily advancing. Fantastically attired they were, with gigantic headdresses of furs and feathers, and their faces were streaked with a vivid crimson paint which rendered their appearance, even at that distance, most repulsive to the view. They were miscellaneously armed with spears, clubs, and birch-wood saplings, and many bore before them broad protecting shields. Indeed it was a motley and fierce-some-looking army to bring against the five

white men of Too-much-gold Creek. In front strode Soapy Sam, revolver in hand, every now and then turning to address his legion. But where was Chilcoot Charlie? For some time Archie could not locate the loud-mouthed renegade among the oncoming horde, but finally he descried him bringing up the rear. Whether he had chosen this position as the one most compatible with safety, or whether he was serving some useful purpose, forcing on the more reluctant of the warriors at the revolver's muzzle, was a matter for conjecture; though, to do him justice, Archie quickly jumped to the latter conclusion. There was no evidence this time of any form of strategy being employed. Soapy was risking all on a bold front and a display of force, and certainly he succeeded in providing an awesome spectacle.

"We must stop them, lads," said Mac sternly. "And yet — and yet, my mind misgives me sore to take human life, even under such great provocation. Try a long shot, Captain. Whisk the feathers out o' that old chap's hair. Maybe that will frighten the others."

Bang! Prompt to the word the Captain fired from his loophole, and at once the waving canopy which a short instant before had decorated a Mongol head, scattered and fell over his shoulder. For a brief second it seemed as if the entire band meant to turn and flee; they hesitated in their march, and gave vent to sundry shrieks of dismay. But Soapy succeeded in quelling the rising riot, and onwards they came again.

"Let me have a pot at Soapy," said Bill, nestling his cheek against his rifle stock and gazing along the

barrel with unquivering eye. " I reckon if I stop him the rest won't have any appetite for their job."

" It seems too much like murder, Bill," answered Mac sadly.

" I reckon he won't have the same tender feeling for us when he gets nearer," grumbled Bill. " Anyhow I'll shift another o' their top pieces jest for amoosement."

And he shifted it so neatly that Archie, who was watching the effect of the shot, marvelled at the unerring precision of his aim. Another slight delay ensued, but the progress of the band was this time scarcely checked.

" There's no help for it, Mac," spoke the Captain. " If we mean to give our own skins a chance we must shoot in earnest."

Mac nodded. " Aim low," he said quietly, and immediately four rifles belched out their deadly messengers, and a corresponding number of Soapy's army temporarily relinquished interest in the fray, howling with rage and dismay at their disablement. The rest, however, seemed suddenly aroused to an extraordinary pitch of madness. They broke into a run, and came swarming up the creek until they were almost opposite the old shaft; but they had not come through the danger zone scatheless. Already the barrel of Archie's rifle was fiery hot. He had shot only to disable; his whole spirit revolted against the slaughter that seemed imminent, and his comrades were scarcely less affected.

" We must shoot to kill now," roared Bill, leaping out into the open. " Send back your gang, Soapy

Sam, or by the Stars and Stripes we'll blow them to glory."

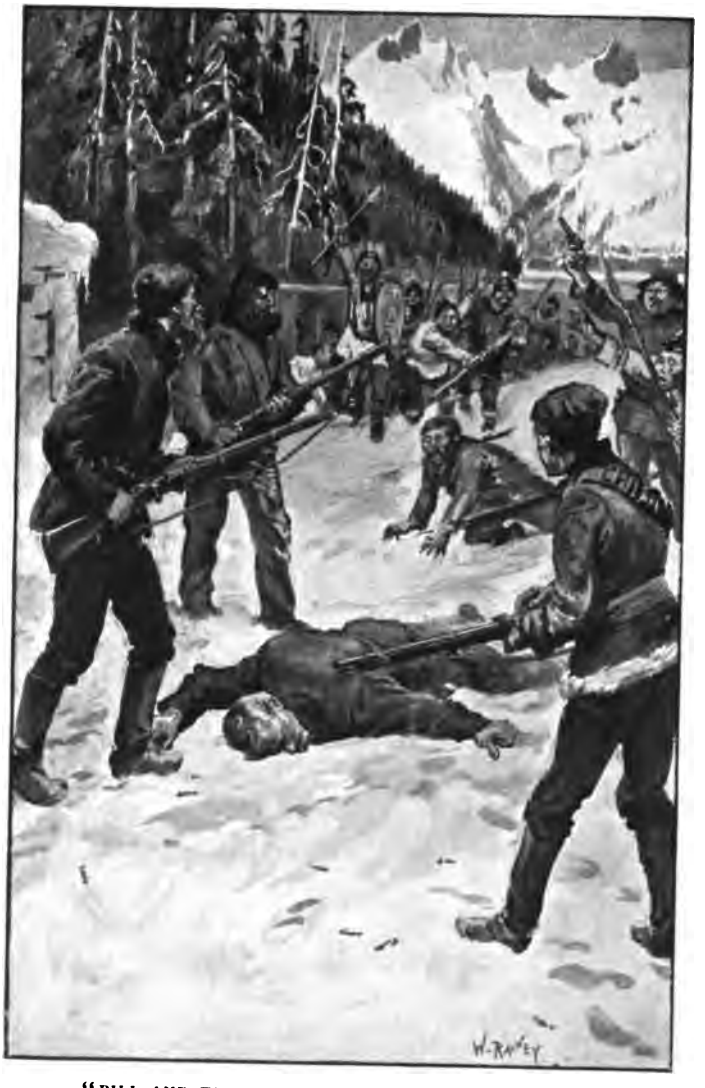
Soapy halted with his forces. "You've made it hotter than I expected, boys," he said pleasantly. "But, as I told you, I can afford to lose as many o' this crowd as can stop a chunk o' lead, an' they're sartain to get you at the finish. You see, you played right into my hands when you bumped things about at the village. You insulted their totems an' the tombs o' their ancestors, an' if anything would make them fight that has done the trick."

Mac stepped out on the ice, followed by the rest of the defenders. In his hand he bore his breech-loader. "Soapy, my man," he said grimly, "we've spared your life, though we've had a heavy grudge against you. At this range my gun would mak' a terrible hole in your ranks. 'Send back the gang——"

An angry muttering broke from the savage band, and their eyes gleamed wildly as they surged forward. With a torrent of uncouth words Soapy Sam turned upon them.

"Archie, lad," said Mac, "take my gun. At this distance it is equal to a' the rifles put together." He thrust the weapon back from him, and walked forward until he was only a short pace or so distant from Soapy Sam. "Send back the gang," he said sternly, "an' we'll fight our differences as man to man."

Another fierce uproar took place among the maddened crew. Chilcoot Charlie was apparently encouraging them from behind. Then, how it happened Archie alone could tell; in the midst of the disturbance a shot was fired and Mac, staggering



"BILL AND THE CAPTAIN LEAPED TO THEIR FALLEN COMRADE'S SIDE"

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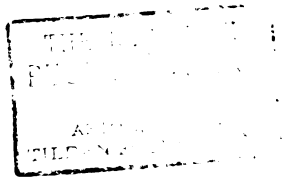


backward, fell heavily at the lad's feet. Then ensued a perfect pandemonium. With hoarse cries of rage Bill and the Captain leaped to their fallen comrade's side and stood over him with rifles levelled and fingers touching the triggers, and Archie, with a groan of anguish, singled out Chilcoot Charlie with the gun that had been given him. In another second that ruffian would have gone to his account. But a further interruption came to interfere with the lad's dreadful purpose. Stewart, for the one short instant, had stood as if turned to stone, but now with a cry the like of which Archie never thought mortal man could utter he bounded forward, his breath coming in great gasps as if the heart of the man were bursting. " Mac! Mac! " he wailed.

His impetuous spring carried him to within a few yards of Soapy Sam; then hurling his revolver from him he drew the weapon which he cherished, the long cruel-looking knife. And Soapy, with a strange glitter in his eye, discarded his own firearm and promptly unsheathed a great curving bowie.

" It's your funeral," he snarled savagely. " Chilcoot, keep back the mob, and I reckon you'll answer to me later."

Not a word more did Stewart utter, and the two men glared at each other like wild animals at bay. Then clash! The blades met; the terrible combat had begun. And now for several seconds there came a lull, a lull of such deadly portent that Archie's nerves chilled under the strain. The two men, with catlike tread, were stalking each other round and round in a narrow circle, each waiting for an opening. Soapy's shoulder and neck were

crouched down into his body, and his knees were bent in readiness for a spring. Stewart's lean frame was doubled forward from the waist, his right hand outstretched, his whole attitude like that of a wrestler seeking his chance. Again the weapons collided in mid air, and, as before, it was Stewart who had taken the aggressive, but Soapy was prepared for the blow, and almost before the ring of steel was heard he returned the attack, lunging desperately at his opponent's broad chest. This was the testing stroke of the duel. Was Stewart's skill equal to the defence? Archie held his breath. But there was no need to fear; his comrade's boast had not been in vain. Stewart's wrist turned but ever so slightly and the gleaming bowie glanced off harmlessly over his shoulder. Then Soapy's face paled. He knew he was pitted against no mean foe. Light as a panther he leaped back, but the lean one followed.

Once more the keen blades clashed, then the action became quicker, and for nearly a minute the ring of conflicting steel was all that could be heard, while the cruel weapons flashed and quivered in the dull light like darts of living flame.

Again and again Stewart struck, and just so often did Soapy Sam effectually guard. His defence seemed impregnable, even as his retaliating onslaughts were coolly calculated. The onlookers on both sides gazed in awe, even the alien mob appeared mesmerized into silence. Round and round the combatants circled, Soapy ever wary yet confident, Stewart grim and decided in his purpose. The sight was terrible to witness. But the climax was

near. Not for long could even the strongest men keep up such a struggle. Seizing an opportunity Soapy suddenly feinted, then struck fiercely at his enemy's heart. Too late to parry the lightning stroke, Stewart took the blow on his left arm, and at once the red blood from a slashing wound stained the snow.

Then Chilcoot Charlie's rasping voice was heard tauntingly: "I reckon that galoot should start an' say his prayers now. Ha! ha! ha!"

Archie groaned. Was he to lose both of his friends at this dread time? But Chilcoot Charlie had spoken prematurely. Stewart's wounded arm dropped limp to his side, but he heeded it not at all. Soapy had scarcely withdrawn his blade ere Stewart's weapon flashed at his breast. Quickly he guarded, his eye sure and his grip firm, but this time Stewart was not to be denied; his mighty strength seemed to concentrate in one culminating effort. No longer was the protecting bowie sufficient barrier. The colliding steel shrilled out, and Soapy's knife was borne resistlessly before the shock, while he swayed backward and fell.

With a roar of fury Stewart stood aloft over his prostrate foe, and his keen blade gleamed on high. But before it fell, while even yet it quivered in mid air, his whole nature seemed to undergo a change, the light of battle fled from his face, leaving it sad and unspeakably miserable. "Your life canna recompense for his," he muttered slowly. He turned away in mute sorrow.

The entire drama had occupied but a few minutes altogether, and neither Archie nor his companions

yet had time to realize truly what had happened. But they gave a shout of joy when they saw Stewart coming towards them, blood-marked and weary, yet victorious.

"Is he dead?" asked he listlessly. "Is Mac dead?"

"No, he's not exactly dead yet, my man," came a weak whisper from the snow, and Mac, regaining consciousness, essayed to get upon his feet.

Stewart uttered a yell of delight; his face positively glowed, and in a moment his strong right arm was supporting his comrade. Archie dared not look; his weapon was needed at the front; but his heart gave a glad bound, and Bill and the Captain at his side muttered fervent prayers of thankfulness. No, Mac was not dead, but a gory channel along his temple showed how near the call had been. His fur cap had fallen to the snow, showing his hair matted with congealing crimson.

In the ranks of the attacking force, meanwhile, dire clamor prevailed. The downfall of their leader had dismayed them, but Chilcoot Charlie's fluently bestowed curses checked their inclination to retreat, and apparently imbued them with a fiercer desire for immediate action. Yet they feared the rifles that opposed them, and while those behind pressed forward the shrinking line in front hustled back. Inch by inch, however, they increased their ground, and when Soapy Sam quietly picked himself up and regained his position in the forefront, the howling crew were no more than half a dozen yards away from their intended prey.

"On ye go, ye yaller cusses!" shrieked Chilcoot

Charlie, keeping his head well out of sight behind the rearguard. " Swipe 'em out! "

" You'd better leave the gang to me," said Soapy Sam significantly, waving back his myrmidons with savage gestures. Then he singled out Stewart with his penetrating eyes, and lo! it was a different man that seemed to speak. " Pardner," he said quietly, the old bravado gone entirely from his voice, " you bested me in fair fight, an' you let up on me when you could easily have cooked my little goose. I ain't such a low-down skunk as to forget a thing like that. I won't run against you any more."

With a snarl of rage Chilcoot Charlie pushed his way to the side of his chief.

" Do you mean that we're goin' to give up Too-much-gold? "

" Yes, sir-ee," answered Soapy Sam promptly. " Have you something to shout out against it? "

" I have," roared the other with a great oath. " I want the gold if you don't, an' I ain't goin' to get back now, not by a jugful I ain't. Take that! you white-livered skunk."

His revolver exploded at point-blank range, and, without even a groan, Soapy Sam collapsed face downwards on the ice, while his slayer dashed back to safety.

" Murderer! " cried Archie in horror, and almost without knowing it he touched the trigger of the gun which Mac had entrusted to him. A ponderous report ensued, and the close-packed shot tore along over the heads of the assembly, just missing the object of its aim, but cleaving his cap and hair off as cleanly as a knife might have done.

" It'll be your turn next, you young devil," yelled the ruffian, clapping his hand to his head as if in doubt as to whether that portion of his anatomy were still in position.

Urged on with his fierce cries the now frenzied band crowded irresistibly forward, stepping over their fallen leader in their progress.

" Now, boys! " said the Captain calmly. " Steady is the word — what, Mac, are you here? "

" Ay," answered Mac drily, and, assisted by Stewart, he pressed to the front, reeling and ghastly to behold. " I can still use a rifle."

A second later the valley reverberated with the thunder of their volley. A perfect inferno followed, and to Archie all things appeared to become suddenly mixed; his head swam, and a tingling sensation in his shoulder, where a bullet had passed, explained the cause of his giddiness. Then he caught sight of Chilcoot Charlie aiming at him a second time. Feebly he tried to raise his revolver; his gun he had already discarded, as he had no time to load up afresh. Then a loud report echoed out from somewhere behind, and his malevolent enemy sank amid the surging masses of his followers. Archie turned round, and dimly he saw a tall figure standing on the bank of the creek, a smoking rifle in his hand; behind him ranged a group of Indian warriors. Then his eyes clouded as if with a heavy mist, and he knew no more.

He awoke to consciousness to find Bill rubbing his forehead with snow, while over him also bent a strangely familiar face.

" Silver Water! " he cried.

" Friend of the Indian," came the reply, " Silve Water hastened fleet as the mountain deer to ai you. Only last sun did he arrive in the home c his people. Glad is his heart that he was in tim to lead the King's warriors over the glacier trail t help his palefaced friends in their hour of danger.'

Archie smiled gratefully, but, ere he could mak answer, his ears caught the sound of a falterin voice near at hand. Aided by Bill and the India he struggled to his feet, and then he saw a pitifu spectacle. There was Soapy Sam, his head sup ported on Stewart's knee, his face deathly pallid On either side stood Mac and the Captain witl bowed heads listening to the words of their erst while enemy.

" Yes, boys," murmured the dying man, " I ad mit I ain't been what you'd call a saint in my time but nuther have I been as bad as some folks woul make out. I never had no kindness shown me til this day, an' I'd got to think there warn't any suc thing as a man that would play the game fair. took young Ralston's invention. That's whar wronged you, an' I'm sorry for it. I thought th thing would work itself, an' I knew o' lots o' gold u in them mountains. I know you've got the thin back; but, boys, before I start out on the lone trail I want to tell you whar there's a hill o' refractor gold. Look for the crater —— "

" Don't tire yourself speakin' about it, Soapy, said Mac gently. " We know where it is."

It seemed as if a glint of joy illuminated Soapy' face. " Wal'," he murmured, " I feel easier no that I know you won't suffer by me stealin' the cor

cern." He was silent for a moment, then he looked at Mac through fast-glazing eyes. "I didn't shoot you old man," he whispered. "Don't put that down to my score."

"We forgive you everything, Soapy," answered Mac. "The man who fired that treacherous shot is dead."

"It was I, Silver Water, who slew the evil white man," said the Indian simply.

"Chilcoot got me all right," smiled Soapy. "Plumb through he's pinked me; but then he couldn't very easily have missed at the range. Ah, well, I reckon I won't harm anyone any more." He gasped for breath, and when he spoke again his voice sounded far away.

"Goodbye, boys; would ye mind givin' me a grip o' your hands? I think I'd go easier after it — just to show you don't bear me any ill will."

Archie knelt down painfully, and clasped the dying man's hand in a farewell grip. "Goodbye, Soapy Sam," he said gravely; "go in peace and free from all our reproaches."

Then Soapy Sam, notorious outlaw and desperado, smiled. "It's mighty hard," he murmured, "that I should meet real white men just as I'm peggin' out. Boys, don't let them be too cruel on my memory. I ain't never been a coward, an' I'm goin' to — die — game."

His voice trailed off in a long fluttering sigh. Soapy Sam was dead. His soul had gone forth to meet the All Merciful Judge before whom no repentant sinner may plead in vain. Reverently the onlookers uncovered their heads. "He died

game," said Mac quietly; " even as he wished, let it be his epitaph."

For nearly a minute a painful silence reigned. Archie's mind was filled with many strange emotions. He could scarcely bring himself to realize that he had been one of the principals in the terrible drama enacted that day. It all seemed so unreal, so impossible. A sharp twinge of pain in his wounded shoulder, however, quickly recalled his wandering fancy, and sadly he turned his gaze on the mute evidences of strife which lay around him. The white-frosted creek was stained and trampled and strewn with discarded weapons; and Chilcoot Charlie, where was he? The youth closed his eyes and would not permit himself to look farther. The horrors of the struggle were made cruelly clear to him. His sensitive nature was not easily inured to scenes of such grim aspect. For the paltry gratification of one man all this devastation had been wrought, and now that man was dead — and Soapy Sam was dead.

The Captain broke in on his unprofitable musings. " Archie, my lad," said he, " I want to dress that shoulder of yours before the cold gets to it. Come into the hut and I'll try and fix it up."

" Yes, go at once, Archie," advised Mac anxiously.

" Are you aware, Mac, my man, " spoke Stewart sternly, " that you look like a walking butcher's adverteesement? I'm thinkin' ye'd better come wi' me this vera meenit, and I'll whisk a bandage round your head in twa jiffs."

" And while you're at the job I'd be as well to come and doctor you, Stewart," said Bill, " for you're

a purty gory-lookin' ornament to go cavortin' about all on your lonesome."

"I think we all stand in need of repairs," remarked Archie with a weary smile. "You don't look too well yourself, Bill."

"Billy's been eatin' something that's disagreed wi' him," hazarded Stewart.

"All mighty fine for you to talk," growled the usually imperturbable American, "but my top piece feels as big as a balloon. Some measly heathen gave me a crack wi' his club, an' the effect don't seem a bit romantic. I'm full up o' clubs, I am. But howlin' tornadoes, we ain't finished yet! Here's another circus comin'."

"Mair trouble," groaned Stewart, "and just when I'd gie onything for a quiet life!"

It was Dave that had alarmed them — Dave, whose appearance was bloody and grim, showing clearly that he, too, had suffered much in the fray, though in the confusion of the struggle his movements had passed unnoticed. His sudden bark brought back the tension of their nerves afresh, but as yet nothing to warrant his outburst could be seen.

"He must have heard something," said Archie positively.

Then Silver Water, who had been standing sombrely by, knelt down and placed his ear close to the ice. "White man's sleigh on trail," he said clearly, rising to his feet. Nor was he mistaken, for a few minutes later, a hurrying dog team accompanied by two men hove into view around the curve leading up from the Klondike.

"There ain't much weight on the sleigh," grunted

Bill, watching its speedy progress earnestly; then he broke into a shout of joy. "Blow me if it ain't Broncho!" he cried. Sure enough, Broncho Jim's familiar figure led the advance, but who was the other man?

"I can't make him out at all," said Mac dubiously. Nearer and nearer drew the light conveyance, the dogs panting and straining at the traces as if worn out by long and forced travel. Finally, with a jerk, the sleigh pulled up alongside the eager group. The dogs promptly rolled over on their sides, gasping for breath, and Broncho, with a sigh of relief, strode over to Mac with outstretched hand, leaving his companion standing hesitatingly in the background. And, wonder of wonders, the second man was none other than the Sheriff! "Wal', boys," spoke Broncho languidly, "you don't need to say a blessed word till I get through. King James told us whar' to find you, and he also made it mighty clear that you were in a blamed bad fix wi' Soapy's gang. We bustled on instanter, but met some o' Silver Water's warriors 'bout a mile back, who told us that the picnic was finished, and that ye war' still able to let out a whoop."

"You can see," said Mac quietly, "the result o' the picnic."

Broncho gazed round unmoved. "Yes, I see, old man," he answered calmly; "an' I kin tell you I'm a sight better pleased to find it ain't the other way about. I reckon the chances were agin you every time. Why, pardners, you all look as if you'd had a purty close call!"

Here the Sheriff came forward, but it was a very

different Sheriff from the one whom they had known in Dawson. He looked woefully cadaverous and haggard. "Say, boys," he said earnestly, "I know you ain't got any reason to like me, an' I'm sorry we didn't hit it off better."

"Let it go at that, pard," interrupted Bill. "This hyer crowd air a mighty forgivin' lot, I kin tell you."

"What's the matter, Sheriff?" asked Mac. "Broncho could have told you we weren't the kind to treasure up grievances against any man. Is there trouble in Dawson?"

"Let me explain, boys," urged Broncho. "As you are aware, I represent a sartain section o' the galoots in Dawson; the Sheriff stands good for the other crowd. Now them last two weeks have been simple howling starvation. The saloon's shut up, and there ain't as much as would feed a sparrow to be picked up anywhere round about."

"But I thought everyone had stores enough to last out the winter!" cried Archie in wonder. "If not, why didn't they get away while they could?"

"Let me tell you," answered Broncho with a forced laugh, "that 'bout seventy-five per cent o' the hull population ain't got more than a few weeks' grub left. And for why? They thought they could always buy it at the store, and the store depended on gettin' in supplies from the coast, owin' to some tom-fool notions gettin' talked o' concarning relief expeditions and suchlike humbuggin' nonsense."

"We were calculating on a relief expedition comin' in," added the Sheriff sadly. "They know in Seattle and San Francisco that we ain't got anything like

stores enough to see us through till spring; but we've given up hope. It means the back trail now, or starvation, or mebbe both. I — I ain't had a squar' meal for a week, boys. I kin tell you it feels mighty bad."

Stewart emitted a cry of sympathy. "You'll no' go hungry awa' from this camp," he said quickly. "Come on, Broncho, you'll hae to dae the cookin' this time, for we're all temporarily disabled, an' vera much in need o' repair."

"One minute, pard," said Broncho. "The Sheriff an' me ain't yet performed our dooty." He fumbled in his breast pocket and drew forth a folded sheet of foolscap, which he solemnly handed over to Mac. "That," he continued, "air the very identical resolution passed at the starvation roll up in Dawson two days ago, which dockyment we promised to deliver, sparing nuther dogs nor men in the execution o' the mission."

"An' we haven't rested day or night since we started," added the Sheriff.

"Read it out, Mac," said the Captain. "But I think I know what it is before you start."

Mac unfolded the paper without a word and read the following:

"At the roll up held in Dawson on this the — day of December, called to consider the dangerous situation brought about by the scarcity of supplies, and to reason out a possible means by which the starvation threatening Dawson might be averted, it was resolved:

"First: That all men under forty years of age must immediately force the back trail outwards to

the coast by the shortest route, that is, by way of the upper Yukon and Chilcoot Pass.

"Second: That the older men, and any who may be afflicted with physical infirmity, remain in Dawson to guard the interests of those who go away.

"Third: That all men taking the trail give over their stores to those who are left, retaining sufficient only to provide half-rations for a period of thirty days, by which time the long trail will either have been negotiated or proved impassable. This course, recommended in the cause of humanity, was unanimously approved by all British and American citizens present at the gathering.

"Fourth: That Archibald Ralston, of Too-much-gold Creek, in view of his knowledge of the long trail, be urged to lead the exodus of Dawson's inhabitants, numbering in all two hundred and fifty souls, and that the other members of his party be requested to join a council comprising the most experienced miners; which council will advise and control the men while on the march, taking upon itself full power to deal with riots and civil strife as may seem fit to it.

"Fifth: That a written copy of these resolutions be entrusted to Broncho Jim of Eldorado Creek, and to Richard Brown, otherwise known as the Sheriff, for safe and speedy delivery to Archibald Ralston of Too-much-gold Creek and his four companions, known as Mac, Stewart, Kentucky Bill, and Captain Cardwell, and that these messengers, representing in themselves all present at the roll up, should honestly and clearly make the condition of affairs in Dawson fully known, and personally

request Archibald Ralston and party to return with them forthwith, if they are willing to take upon themselves the responsibilities offered in clause fourth!"

Drawn up and signed in Dawson City (Alaska or North-West Canada).

God Save the Queen!
Hail Columbia!

ALF. MACINTOSH, Bonanza Creek,
President of Roll-Up Committee.

A low murmur of surprise issued from the lips of the listening group.

"Is that all?" asked Stewart.

"I reckon it couldn't have been made much plainer," commented Bill with unwonted quietness of demeanor.

The Captain preserved a grave silence, and Archie seemed deep in troubled thought.

"What is the answer to be, boys?" said Broncho, trying without success to appear indifferent. "I know you're better fixed than any o' us. You've got three or four months grub stored in my shanty an' — an' you've struck gold I reckon; but thar' ain't no one who knows the blessed trail like you, an' — an' —— "

"White man cannot go over the great white trail," broke in Silver Water suddenly. "The snows lie deep on the pass. The great lakes are blotted out in whiteness. The blizzards rage and the gray wolves cry out for food. Let not the white man dare the dangers of the Indian wilds."

Then Mac spoke, and his voice was calm and low: "You have heard what Silver Water says, lads. Danger and maybe death lie in wait on the back trail, but remember it offers the only hope of life to starving men, who must die if they remain. There's only one answer we can give you Broncho, and Archie will speak it now."

"We'll go," said Archie simply.

Again Silver Water spoke a warning note. "Friend of the Indian," he said, clutching Archie eagerly by the hand, "go not back upon the white trail. Stay with Silver Water ——"

"We'll come again, Silver Water," replied Archie gently. "We will leave everything here in your care, but now we must go."

The Indian shook his head sadly. "The great snows cover the valley," he murmured. "Never more will Silver Water see his paleface friends."

At this moment Dave pressed between the two, whining deeply.

"Ah, Dave!" said Archie, "now you will have to leave me, for Silver Water has returned and you are no longer my dog."

The Indian looked wistfully at the two. "Silver Water takes not back his gifts," he said brokenly. "Gladly would he too go with you on the trail, but weary are his limbs with much travel, and soon the snows would conquer his strength. Oh, beware of the sliding glacier, beware of the thunderous avalanche! Silver Water has spoken and bids you farewell!"

He wheeled abruptly and departed swiftly along the mountain side.

"The Indian spoke truly, laddie," said Mac quietly. "Have you considered well what the journey may mean? You are young, and we have no right to ask you to take such terrible risks ——"

"We take the risks together," answered Archie with a smile. "I will go."

CHAPTER XVI

THE GREAT EXODUS

SULLEN and drear was the mighty Yukon valley. Its vast rolling snow wastes shone bleak and forbidding in the dull light, and the tall pines fringing the banks of the frostbound river drooped under their hoary mantle. Far as the eye could reach, the cold, glimmering channel stretched and twined on and on, until it blended with the distant mists of the horizon and was lost in a common pall of whiteness which supervened. Not a sound broke the solemn stillness of the scene. All was ghostly and grim and unspeakably melancholy. It was as if Nature were brooding over the death of the land she had loved, silent, terrible, inscrutable in her sorrow. Quickly, stealthily, the gray shadows of advancing night drew nigh. Almost imperceptibly the gloom of day was merging into the darkness of evening. Brief indeed had been the course of the sun, and, though it was but two o'clock, already the stars twinkled in the heavens.

Then suddenly there came a subtle change; the air seemed to vibrate with unwonted echoes. Life had come to this vale of desolation, fervid, hurrying life. What venturous band had dared to trespass on these tomblike solitudes? The frost-crusted ice crackled under the tread of hastening feet, the swish of sleigh

runners was heard, a dog's sharp bark reverberated through the gathering dusk, and yet the evidences of human voice were strangely lacking. Occasionally a man's encouraging shout rang out, but more often it was a weakly cry of hopelessness and fear that betokened the presence of the striving wanderers. For the most part the quietude of the vale was scarce disturbed by such incongruous sounds. Only the rasping note of the sleighs and the dull tramp of many feet kept steadily throbbing without cessation through the keen ether.

And now through the eerie twilight there strode forth a man — a man indeed, yet but a boy so far as years might count. His slim figure was muffled to the ears in furs, and he carried a long rifle in his hand. Neither to the right nor to the left he looked; his eyes, kept fixed on the onward distance, seemed to penetrate the gathering haze. With light nervous steps he passed on — the youthful marker of the trail. Next, after a short interval, there came to view a quartette of stalwart miners and a great mastiff, all pulling at a sleigh. Resolute and stern were these men, and as they approached they conferred together in low anxious tones, ever and anon turning to glance hastily back as if impelled by constant doubts and fears. They, too, passed on with sure and steady pace. Following them a weird procession hove dimly out of the mists, headed by sundry staggering dog teams and some score of trail-worn men. Cruelly stern was the panorama. Close after the dogs struggled a solemn array of weary sleigh pullers. With shoulders bent and bodies leaning forward they tugged listlessly at their

loads, grimly persistent, yet weakening at every step.

Last came a motley army of men in Indian file, long-haired, wild-eyed, and famished-looking, carrying their loads strapped to their backs. Straggling far behind, they forced feverishly on their way, blindly stumbling, and often falling on the snowy track. Tall men, short men, stout men — and they were not many, — and thin men followed in miscellaneous order. Some were lame and limped painfully; many showed too terribly the ravages of frost on their haggard features, and a few were borne along solely by the efforts of their fellows, who thus willingly gave of their frail strength in the cause which makes all men kin.

Then out of the dim ranks issued a querulous voice: " Isn't it time we camped now? For eight hours this day we've followed the cursed trail. I'm— I'm blown out — I want to rest."

" Never say die," cheered another of the phantom shapes. " The trail leader knows what he is about. He wants to make Big Salmon River to-night. We must keep up. Shake her up again, boys."

With a hoarse answering shout the lagging procession broke into an odd ambling run. The gloom deepened. Darkness shrouded the land.

. . . . . .

The young trailmaker halted and gazed back uneasily over the cold, white expanse he had just traversed. " It's strange that I should have got so far ahead," he muttered, " I don't think I've forced the pace more than usual." Eagerly he scanned the dim horizon. All was motionless and bare. Not a sign

of life was visible anywhere. The great snowy plains of Lake Tagash spread before his vision, silent and desolate. He had reached the end of the lake after a long day's travel, which had involved much anxious speculation, for there are at least three valleys opening into Tagash, any one of which might easily have been mistaken for the main course. "I wish I had looked back earlier," he said again. "I was so worried making that course across Windy Arm that I scarcely thought of those coming behind. Ah well! they won't have much difficulty following my trail, even in the dark, for my snowshoes have made quite a deep impression. It's curious how the snowfall should be so heavy here when there's so little down Dawson way. I suppose it must be owing to the influence of the coast. . . . I think I'll build a fire on the shore and wait till they come."

He struck off towards the edge of the forest which covered the gently sloping banks of Caribou Crossing, the connecting channel leading to Lake Bennett. But before he reached the side he paused to have a final look back, and at once several furtive shapes appeared to dart before his eyes and cower in the shadow of the timber. A stifled exclamation burst from the lad's lips. "Wolves!" he whispered. "I've never known them come so near before. I wonder if theyv'e been following me?" He gripped his rifle tighter, and hurried on to prepare his fire. Soon he gathered together a heap of brushwood sufficient to start a blaze, and when this was done he felt more at ease. "I'm afraid my nerves are out of order," he said, forcing a laugh. Why the brutes have cleared out already —— "

But the words choked back in his mouth, for he suddenly became conscious of a pair of fiercely gleaming eyes peering at him from the depths of the scrub. He recovered himself with an effort, and hastily applied a light to the pile, and as the flame sprang up he set energetically to work and hauled in fresh logs from the near vicinity. Night was closing in. Deeper and deeper grew the shadows on the lake. The youth rested from his labors, and, taking his rifle in his hand, strode out into the open, bent on having a last survey of the trail. Then did a familiar sound reach his ears. A dog had barked in the near distance, and immediately his heart leaped for joy. "That must be Dave," he cried eagerly. "Now they must be quite near." Again a hoarse bark shattered the stillness, and now the watcher could descry a dull object speeding towards him over the darkening snow. But a chill of horror swept over him when he saw vague lurking forms issue from the blackness of the forest and steal out to intercept the approaching animal.

"Dave!" cried the youth. "Dave!" The dog had by this time realized the presence of his enemies, yet straight into the midst of the waiting pack he rushed, answering their snarling cries with a deep growl of defiance. Despairingly the lad awaited the fateful issue; not for a moment did he expect that Dave could pass through that savage cordon. Yet in the brief interval his rifle leaped to his shoulder, and he fired several shots in rapid succession at the expectantly crouching creatures. The light was too dull, and he had aimed short.

With an almost diabolical throaty chuckle the gray

wolves sprang at their intended prey, but their thirsty fangs clashed impotently as Dave's ponderous bulk hurtled high in the air. Before they could strike again the great mastiff turned quick as a flash, and his powerful jaws crunched in the neck of his nearest assailant. In an instant the ravenous brutes had sprung upon their fallen associate, and, escaping from the ordeal with but a few light wounds, the dog bounded on his way, leaving the pack to their horrible feast. The youthful trailmaker welcomed him with glad thankfulness. "Well done, Dave!" he said, patting the animal tenderly. Then he noticed that a small package was attached to his collar. Wonderingly he undid it and walked back to the fire to investigate the contents, his canine companion following closely at his heels. Swiftly he opened out the canvas wrapping, which had evidently been torn from an empty flour sack, and then he looked with amused wonder at what was disclosed. It was a piece of bread. Yet there was something else. A small piece of paper fluttered to the snow. The youth pounced upon it immediately. It contained but a few lines which had apparently been hastily scribbled by the serviceable end of a rifle cartridge:

"DEAR ARCHIE: — We had to call a halt on the south side of Windy Arm; another of the poor fellows collapsed on the march, and it went sore against us to leave him for the wolves to feed on. We are building him a monument of stones. A good many more seem likely to drop out before we reach the Pass. Half-rations and hard travel are too much for most of the men on the trail. We'll follow up your

tracks to-night, and camp at Caribou Crossing. Stewart sends you your share of the damper. Take care of yourself, my lad. Light a fire to keep off the wolves. God be with you!

"MAC."

"Another victim of the trail," groaned the lad. "And the worst is yet to come." He shook his head hopelessly; then longingly he eyed the piece of damper. "It's more than my share, I know," he murmured, starting to eat the rough fare ravenously, and as he did so he became aware that Dave was watching the rapidly diminishing food supply with profound interest. Archie smiled, broke the remaining portion in two, and handed the larger fragment to the hungry dog. The meagre meal finished, he sat down on a fallen tree near the fire and gave himself up to drowsy reflections. The privations of the desperate journey had told heavily upon him. He was weaker than he cared to admit. But while he thus lightly slumbered Dave seemed ill at ease. Backwards and forwards he patrolled, with ears erect and hair bristling, and from his throat issued strange, rumbling sounds, beginning in a whimper, ending in a growl. Lower and lower sank the flames.

Archie awoke with a suddenness that jerked him to his feet before he was well conscious of the fact. In his ears there rang a fiercesome cry, the like of which he had never heard before. It thrilled through his being like an electric shock. By the flickering light of the dying fire he saw Dave only a few feet away, crouched back on his haunches as if ready

for a spring, his whole body tense and quivering; and opposing him, snarling and terrible, was a great, gaunt wolf, fangs bared and mouth dripping, the very embodiment of brute ferocity. But that was not all; in the gloom beyond numerous slinking shadows appeared, now clustering near, now retreating, but ever keeping their wakeful eyes in front. He took the whole scene in at a glance. Its dread meaning was not lost upon him. The wolves, maddened by hunger, had conquered their fear of man. It was food they sought, and he and the dog were to be the food. He raised his rifle mechanically, his finger was on the trigger, then slowly he lowered it again, and beads of perspiration formed on his brow. He had just remembered that he had no other cartridges than those contained in the magazine of his gun. He had discharged four, therefore only one remained. For the moment his heart seemed to stop beating; the horror of his situation almost overcame him, but the spasm of fear passed away, leaving him calm and resourceful. He stooped down to throw more fuel on the glowing embers, noting wonderingly the while how eagerly the foremost wolf watched his every movement; its jaws gaped longingly, its lean body half swerved towards him.

But Dave was there, motionless, alert, and again there sounded forth his deep-toned roar. It was not a bark or a growl, but a weird combination of both, harsh and terrible in its menacing fury. The flames leaped out anew as Archie hurriedly flung on the logs, and a lurid glare lit up the narrow camp circle, showing plainly the skulking pack that lay between

him and the open lake. There they were, gray, lean creatures of the night, silently passing and repassing before his vision. He hurled a flaming brand full at the foremost of them, the one which had so boldly crept up in front of Dave It sprang back, snarling, with fangs bared to the roots, and eyes gleaming with carnivorous malignity. But it did not go far. A few yards from the fire it calmly lay down in the snow and rested, and inch by inch the others crept up and snuggled by its side. Archie shivered. Soon he began to take an intense interest in his fire, arranging it so that numerous burning faggots were ever ready to his hand. These he threw at regular intervals among the pack. At first he was successful in driving them back, but almost immediately they would return to the same position as before, or, if anything, nearer. Latterly they scarcely moved from their places, despite his frantic, fiery onslaughts. They had now extended their front. They had completed a ring round about the fire. Archie could see them plainly by the light of the burning logs. Some appeared to be asleep, save for the fact that they gradually bellied themselves forward; others crawled and skulked about in an ever-narrowing circle.

Meanwhile Dave continued to give vent to strange throaty mutterings, and, with his back to the fire, he pivoted round and round with ceaseless vigilance. Well he knew that, should he dare to force the attack, not one, but all the pack would fall upon him. Archie was in despair; try as he might he could not check that grimly closing cordon. Weary through lack of sleep, he kept his eyes open with difficulty, and, as the hours wore on, he began to stumble weakly.

Finally he collapsed in a heap beside the fire, and then something gray and white leaped across the firelit zone. Dimly he saw it coming, and instinctively he rolled over on his side. There was a clash of teeth, a yelp of pain, as the savage beast's feet touched the hot ashes, and sparks showered up at the contact. With a strong effort the lad regained his feet. The wolf that had sprung at him was the wolf that had first dared Dave. Now it was dead. Dave's teeth had met in its neck, almost severing the head from the body. The carcass sizzled on the hot cinders where it had fallen, and Dave stood with bloody mouth gloating over it.

The circle was now alarmed. It swayed inward, then retreated, but came on again, until the eager muzzles of the hungry beasts almost singed in the flames. Archie pressed back so far that the heat scorched through his moccasins. As before, the pack retreated, but one more of its number was left; Dave had again secured the foremost of them. Silent and sure he had struck. No paltry slashing blow was his; where his ponderous jaws closed, bone, sinew, and flesh alike crushed and crumpled up. In the short lull that followed, Archie conceived an idea, which he at once proceeded to put into practice. Seizing one of the burning logs he flung it forward, so that it fell immediately in front of the wolves; then, carefully calculating the distance, he threw fresh timber on the blaze, so that a new fire sprang into being. Next he contrived to bring about the same result on the opposite side, and in this also he was successful. But the wolves, not to be denied, now congregated at the open spaces, and by this

time their aspect of expectancy had vanished, and in its place was a mad, malevolent fury. The lad, almost blind with smoke and ashes, could now see nothing wherever he might turn but flashing fangs and wildly protruding eyes.

While he was debating with himself as to whether his fuel would last out sufficiently for two more fires, another rush came. Somehow he had begun to feel accustomed to these attacks; it seemed as if he had been doing nothing else all day but repulsing them. He forgot when he had arrived at this wolf camp; he had a confused idea that he had been there for ages. Mechanically he gathered up brands and glowing cinders, and hurled them in the snarling wolves' faces that beset him. With scarce any surprise he saw them cower back, leaving another of their number amongst the slain. Dave was warming to his work. So long as he could get one of the gaunt brutes a little removed from the others, so surely that brute died. After this, Archie got two more fires in operation. He calculated he had timber enough to last for two hours yet; surely help would come ere then. With the four outside fires burning, he considered he had no need for the central one, so he let it die out. Then he sat down on the timber pile and tried to keep a watch on the four separate channels of entrance at once.

He could not see beyond the fiery ring he had created, but he knew well enough that his savage foes were still there. Anon he had proof of this, for one long-snouted she-wolf boldly pushed in between the flames. She would have drawn back naturally because of the heat encountered, but Dave

was waiting. There came a shrill yell, a strangled snarl, then silence. The mastiff had added yet another to the list of dead, but on this occasion he had not come off without hurt. His flank had been ripped by a slash of the wolf's fang. Moaning and growling in turn he came to Archie for comfort, and the youth caressed his bleeding side pityingly; but even while he was doing so another intruder ventured in from an opposite direction, and the dog sprang off to fulfil his self appointed task. Archie watched him with a strange feeling surging in his breast. If the dog made but one mistake his life would surely pay the forfeit, for a starving wolf is a desperate antagonist. But the dog made no mistake. He struck swift and true, always in the one vital place, behind the ear. This time there was a flash of teeth, a snarl, and a muffled growl, then the victor trotted back contentedly.

After that Archie's growing weakness overcame him. With a last struggle he fed the flames afresh, then he lay back weary and swooning; but he still kept tight grip of his rifle. He did not altogether lose consciousness, however; the instinctive desire for life still throbbed powerfully away at the back of his brain. As in a dream he saw and heard what took place around him. Always it was the same drama that was enacted before his closing eyes, and his ears became attuned to the sound of clashing teeth. One dog against at least a score of wolves. What a Homeric combat! The snap of the slashing fangs, the growls, the snarls, the yelps, all resolved themselves into a kind of ceaseless refrain to his tired senses. "It is the Song of the Trail," he

murmured drowsily. Bang! a deafening discharge echoed through the night. Bang! again came the welcome sound, and now eager voices were heard without the fiery circle. "They've come!" cried the youth, staggering to his feet with a glad shout of welcome. "Dave, they've come!"

A moment later four men burst into the enclosure. Four strong men they were, but their faces were thin and haggard, and their bodies pitifully attenuated. The leader carried a still-smoking breech-loader in his hand. "You've had a hard fight, laddie," he said with deep emotion. "Thank God we've found you alive!"

The trailmaker smiled wanly. "You sent me the dog, Mac," he answered simply; "that was enough."

Enough, yea surely enough, for when he looked around, behold there was a rampart of dead wolves piled just within the fiery radius. "Dave," he cried, "Wolf-dog Dave, come here!" And the dog came and licked his hand.

. . . . . .

Shrill moaned the wind down the Chilcoot cañon. A blizzard was raging on the pass, and the ice-laden blasts swept and swirled down the darkened vale. Sheep Camp — a new Sheep Camp built on the same dangerous site as its unfortunate predecessor — felt the full force of the storm, and its half-score of log huts swayed and trembled on their icy foundation. The Mascotte Saloon, phœnix-like, reared anew, and sheltering beneath the same cold glacier shadow, rocked and shuddered under the rain of icy fragments that showered from overhead, and at in-

tervals its stout timbers strained and cracked ominously. Here, as before, on a similar night of grim foreboding, there congregated the entire population of the camp, huddling for warmth around the stove, and listening to the howling gale outside with nervous apprehension.

"There ain't been such a storm as this," cried one, "since the Englishmen crossed the pass."

"And that was the night of the wipe out," answered another significantly.

After this conversation became somewhat stilted. At length the first speaker broke out again as if his mind had meanwhile been musing over long-past events. "I wonder what happened to them chaps," he said. "I remember there was a young fellow in the party, the one who built the railway over the pass, an' there war' also two mighty tough-lookin' Scotsmen. Then I think Kentucky Bill and Captain Cardwell went out wi' them — I wonder how they got on?"

"Dead, I reckon," grunted the man nearest the stove laconically.

Then a grizzled veteran spoke: "There will be a lot o' dead men on the trail between here and the Klondike by now," he said gravely. "If Silver Water spoke true there was going to be a big starve out in Dawson. Like enough the poor devils would tackle the back trail, an' no livin' man could make that journey at this time o' year. May heaven help them!"

"Amen!" came the fervent response from all present.

An awed silence took possession of the assembly.

Louder and louder shrieked the storm. They shivered and drew closer to the fire. They were aroused from their moody reverie by a heavy pounding at the bolted door. As one man they sprang to their feet, amazement showing on every feature. What could this mean? Surely no one could be without on such a night? For a moment they stood irresolute. Again came the startling summons, sharp, imperative. The solid logs resounded with the crashing blows delivered apparently by a rifle stock. Then the inmates of the Mascotte Saloon recovered themselves, and one of their number rushed to open the door. The stout barricade swung inward, and amid a gusty cloud of snow a slim trailworn figure accompanied by a gaunt mastiff reeled forward out of the night. Behind him pressed a ghostlike army clothed in white — grim, silent, deathly.

"In God's name who are you?" cried the man who had opened the door, staggering back in affright.

In a faint voice came the answer from the lips of the youthful leader. "We are the men from Dawson . . . what is left of them."

. . . . . .

Ralph Ralston, with an air preoccupied and sad, took up the *Glasgow Herald* and listlessly scanned the pages. He had done the same before week after week, ever since his brother had sailed away from Seattle, but always he had laid down the paper with a stifled sigh of disappointment. Information regarding the sub-arctic El Dorado had ceased wifh

the beginning of winter, and for these last four months the new goldfield had been completely cut off from the outside world. This morning, however, his eyes brightened as they caught sight of a column headed: American News; and immediately afterwards he uttered a joyful exclamation.

"News from Klondike!" he cried. "News from Klondike!"

His sister Queenie rushed into the room with a little scream of delight. "Is he well? When will he be home? Where does he write from? And — oh! — it's not a letter after all ——!"

"No, it's a press cable message," said her brother, waving the paper in his hand, and smiling as she had never seen him smile before.

"Then give it to me. Quick!" she demanded, her eagerness breaking out afresh. She straightway captured the *Herald* and read aloud:

"'SEATTLE, WASH. — Archibald Ralston, accompanied by four well-known pioneers and his famous dog Dave, arrived here to-day by the *S. S. Corona*. There also travelled by the same vessel about two hundred miners returned from Klondike. The entire party, forced by starvation to leave Dawson, was led over the long trail by Ralston, to whom the miners give extraordinary praise. It is stated that the young man, with his comrades, discovered an enormously rich creek away back in the upper reaches of the Klondike River, from which they have all amassed considerable fortunes. It is also reported that they have been successful in locating the great mother lode of the district. They intend returning in the summer with a new kind of machin-

ery for treating the ore. They leave for England by the eastern-bound train to-morrow. The miners give a terrible story of the icy trail, on which fifty of their number are supposed to have perished.' — *Reuter*."

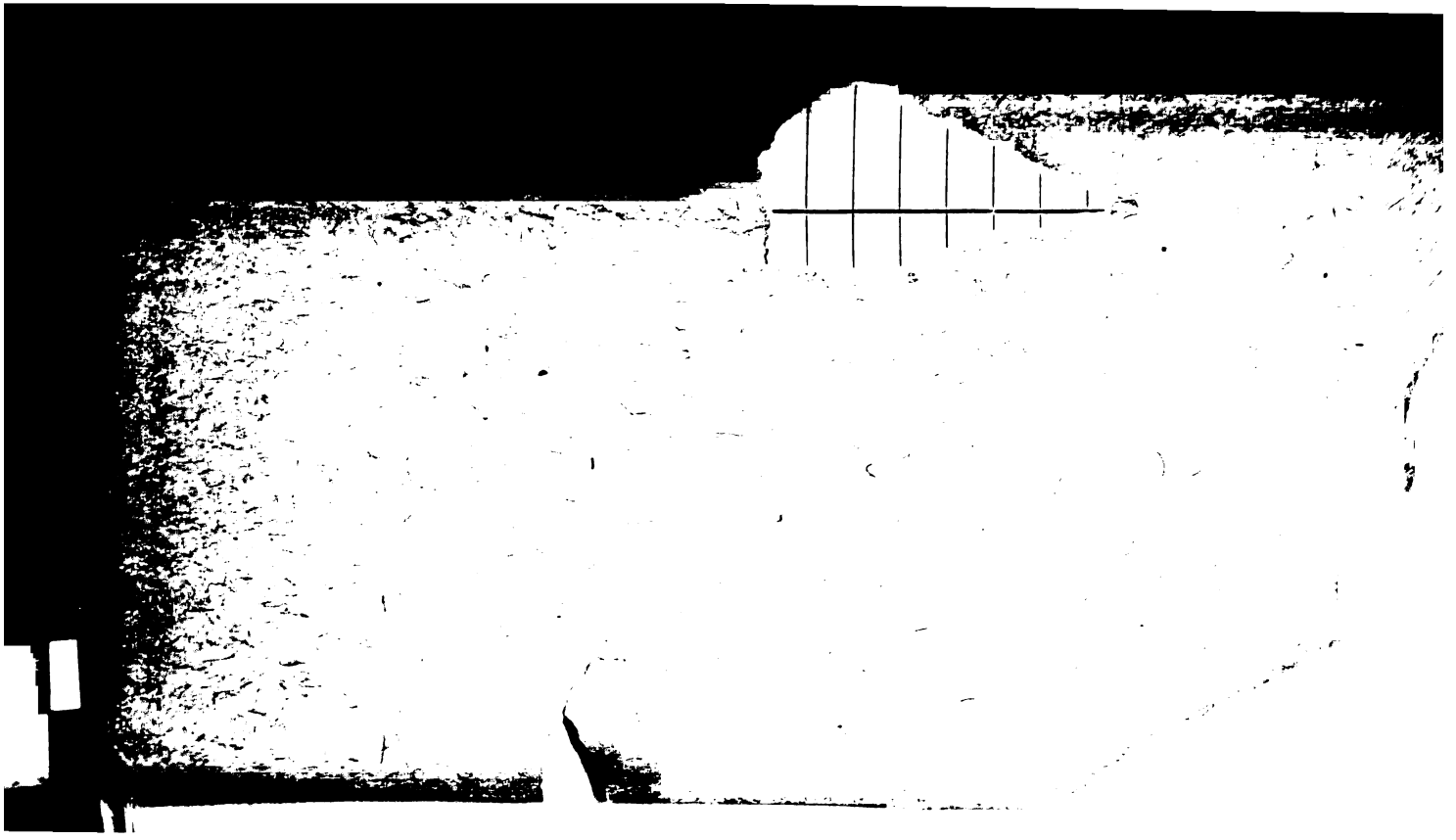
"Oh — h — !" she murmured. "Oh — *h* — !' It was the very limit of expressiveness.

"Thank God he is safe!" said the mother with trembling lips.

A peremptory ring at the door bell broke in upon their happy reflections. Queenie darted off returning immediately with an envelope marked: "Cablegram — Urgent."

"It's a real one this time," she said breathlessly. "What does it say, Ralph? Do hurry! I'm dying to know!"

Her brother tore open the envelope and read the message enclosed.

"Seattle. Arrived all well. Made small fortune. Too-much-gold Creek. Everything assured now. Process suited for big Klondike lode. Returning *S. S. Campania* with four comrades and Dave."

"Thank God he is safe!" repeated Mrs. Ralston and her eyes filled with tears of gladness.